

## When Duty Is Difficult

Franklin Church of Christ  
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AM Worship

### Introduction:

Do you ever feel like God's commands are too difficult? Do you wish God would give you extra help to make difficult duties easier? Are you aware the apostles had these same thoughts? In **Luke 17:1-10**, Jesus instructed His disciples about forgiveness. They could only reply, "Increase our faith." In other words, "Master, this is too difficult. Please, give us some help." When Jesus responded, they were probably surprised. Because He did not give them what they asked.

### Discussion:

- I. Be assured, God asks us to do difficult things.
  - A. Modern society has become convinced God does not ask His servants to do difficult things. If you were to suggest they ought to sacrifice a ball game in order to encourage their brethren in the assembly (**Hebrews 10:25**), you would think you had asked them to cut off their right arms. That shock is multiplied when the issue really is difficult, such as giving up an unlawful marriage partner (**Matthew 19:9**) or, sometimes even harder, staying with a lawful one (**Matthew 19:6**).
  - B. Most people expect Christianity to be instinctual, that is, to just come naturally. If a command goes against what is natural, men will go out of their way to explain how it does not apply to them. "Surely God does not expect so much out of me. That is too hard."
  - C. Jesus' statement in **Luke 17:3-4** is not easy. Rebuking and forgiving a brother seven times in one day does not come naturally. Our natural reaction is to hold grudges, keep scores, get even and gossip. But God expects us to do the difficult thing. You must understand that the difference between those traveling to destruction and those traveling to life is whether or not they choose the difficult way. Few choose the right path (**Matthew 7:13-14**). Which path have you chosen?
- II. God does not give us permission to disobey, even though the duty is difficult.
  - A. Many have sold out the gospel, teaching that God will not give difficult duties. We have not followed that teaching. Yet, have we drifted into thinking that when something is difficult, God will not hold us as accountable? Do we think that the hard commands are not as strict?
  - B. What about the command regarding marriage and divorce? According to Jesus, man is not allowed to separate what God has joined (**Matthew 19:6**). But what if your husband is a no account bum and will not work? What if your wife is belligerent, disrespectful and wasteful? God has not given you the option of divorce. But we would understand if you did divorce, wouldn't we? Does God understand? Maybe God will not be so strict in your case? Maybe in your case it is acceptable to get an unlawful divorce. Surely God understands how difficult your marriage is.
  - C. But look at Jesus' illustration. In **Luke 17:7-9**, Jesus described a servant who had been working hard all day. When he came into the house, did he get to eat and enjoy the evening? No, he had to serve his master until the master was satisfied. The servant did that without even a "Thank you." Was that servant allowed to opt out of his duties because they were difficult? Did the master even give a second thought to letting him out of his duties? No, he was a servant and that is what servants do. So it is for us. We do what we have been commanded, because we are servants of God. Even when it means forgiving a brother or a spouse.
- III. God has already given us the strength to obey His difficult commands.
  - A. The apostles obviously thought they could not obey this teaching. So they replied, "Increase our faith" (**Luke 17:5**). Jesus would have to do something special so they could obey this command.
  - B. Too often Christians have this attitude. Have you? When you have sinned, have you said, "That's just the way I am."? Have you defended sin, saying, "I haven't grown that much yet."? Have you seen a Christian who has done the difficult duty and thought, "I wish God would give me the strength He has given him. Then I could overcome my sins too."? These statements demonstrate an attitude that says, "God, you have to do something extra for me so I can obey."
  - C. Notice Jesus' response. When asked to increase their faith, Jesus did not perform some miracle, giving them a "gift of faith" (**cf. I Corinthians 12:9**). He did not offer a teaching that made their faith so strong that obedience was natural. Instead, He told them they did not need more faith. He explained that with faith the size of a mustard seed they could move a tree from one

place to another by speaking to it. How hard could it be to forgive? These men did not need more faith. They needed to use the faith they had.

- D. This attitude is really a form of dodging responsibility. If we convince ourselves some commands are so difficult only a special gift of faith will allow us to obey, we can believe it is not our fault if we disobey. It is God's fault. Remember what Paul said in **I Corinthians 10:13**. God does not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able. We can obey every command.
- E. At the risk of weakening Jesus' point, let me clarify one issue. Do not go away from this thinking you should not pray to God for strength or faith. In the model prayer, Jesus demonstrated we should pray for God to deliver us from evil (**Matthew 6:13**). In Gethsemane, Jesus told His inner circle to pray lest they enter temptation (**Matthew 26:41**). We do pray for strength. But if we sin, it is not because God did not give us enough faith. He has given what we need. If we sin, it is because we choose to disobey.

#### IV. We need a sense of duty.

- A. Why did the servant in Jesus' story obey his master? Because that was his job. He had a sense of duty and did not question it. We need to have that same sense of duty toward God.
- B. This is the attitude Paul had, repeatedly referring to himself as God's servant (**Romans 1:1; Galatians 1:10; Philippians 1:1; et al**). According to Strong's Enhanced Lexicon, this servant is one who "gives himself up to another's will" and one who is "devoted to another to the disregard of one's own interests."
- C. One thing sorely lacking today, especially among my own generation, is this sense of duty. Instead of a sense of duty and responsibility to do what is right, there is a sense of doing what I want. If I do anything, I first determine what is in it for me. Why do you think there are so many marriages falling apart? Because too many husbands and wives do not have a sense of duty in their marriage. Why do so many bosses find it difficult to get good help these days? Because few people have a sense of duty on the job. Why are so many churches foundering? Because too few Christians have a sense of duty for Christ's work.
- D. The apostles asked Jesus to increase their faith. He said they did not need their faith increased; they needed to increase their faithfulness. When we are faced with difficult commands, we must not make excuses about weak faith. We must make God our master and walk in the Spirit.

#### V. When you have done the difficult duty, do not commend yourself.

- A. The final thing Jesus pointed out was when they did their difficult duties, they had simply done what they should have done. When we obey God, we must not view ourselves as special. We must not think we are better than other Christians. We must not believe people should look up to us. We must not think we offer such a great deal of service that God is lucky to have us on His side. We must not become like the Pharisee in **Luke 18:11-12**.
- B. Jesus said, when we have done what is commanded, we should view ourselves as unprofitable servants. God is not "making" any profit from us. We ought to be thankful God has given us the opportunity to serve Him and forgiven us for the times we did not obey.
- C. When we have this attitude, God, unlike the master in Jesus' story, will say, "Thank you." God will commend us, even though we do not deserve it. As in the parable of the talents, God will tell us, "Well done good and faithful servant" (**Matthew 25:20**). But remember the words of Paul in **II Corinthians 10:18**. We are to seek the Lord's commendation. When we commend ourselves we are not approved.

#### Conclusion:

As we conclude, all I can say is, **Luke 17:1-10** is kind of harsh. But Jesus said it. I often look at my own life and the service I render and realize it is weak, flabby and self-centered. I do not like being told to buck up and do what I am supposed to and quit whining about how hard it is. Instead, I want people to stroke my ego and tell me what a great job I am doing. I want them to tell me that even with the sins I commit, I am really not all that bad so don't worry about it. But then I come to the Bible; it crushes that ego and self-glory, bringing in a reality check. God wants obedience, not excuses. What are we giving Him?