

Unprofitable Servant

Obeying God is a duty and not a service. The best we can do is still less than what we owe to God as our sovereign Lord; there is no place for preening and complacency in discipleship.

Luke 17:7-10

INTRODUCTION

In Luke 17:1-10, four laws have the ability to revolutionize society. These laws, if heeded, will revolutionize society and our lives.

- Law 1: Luke 17:1-2 stumbling blocks will come (warning), don't be a stumbling block (punishment), but rather be a stepping stone (service).
- Law 2: Luke 17:3-4 be on guard (warning), forgive your brother (commandment), as many times as it takes (warning), or else you will not be forgiven (consequence and service)
- Law 3: Luke 17:5-6 have faith! (divine help is needed to accomplish all these things) - faith is the most powerful force in the world
- Law 4: Luke 17:7-10 obeying God is a duty, and in the end, we are still unprofitable servants

[Luke 17:7-10 focuses on service, ministry, faithfulness, labor, and steadfastness.](#)

1 We Are Servants (Luke 17:7)

EXPLANATION

- Servant (doulos) is the same word as a slave. "A master would never think of eating with his slaves." (Arnold).
- In this parable, Jesus chose "slave" to emphasize "faithfulness to duty no matter what the demands might be." (Wiersbe)
- Jesus was a servant (doulos) to His disciples (Luke 22:27; **"For who is greater, the one who reclines *at the table* or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines *at the table*? But I am among you as the one who serves."**)

2**Serve and Obey Until the Work is Done (Luke 17:7-8)****EXPLANATION**

- As a servant (doulos) this man was a jack of all trades:
 - worked the fields
 - tended to the animals
 - took care of the housework
 - prepared the meals
 - tended to the lord of the house
 - It did not matter how long the day was, how taxing the work was, how hot or cold the day may have been, or how demanding the master may have been - the servant had to finish all the tasks and WAIT until all was completed before he could eat his meal. It was his duty.
- Bible texts:

- **John 4:34; "Jesus *said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work."**
 - **John 9:4; "We must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day; night is coming when no one can work."**
 - **1 Corinthians 15:58; "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not *in vain* in the Lord."**
 - **2 Timothy 4:5; "But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry."**
 - **Hebrews 6:11-12; "And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises."**
- This type of obedience requires:
 - dedication
 - faith (hence, increase our faith)
 - discipline
 - endurance (until the end)
 - preparation (day and night, the parable of the virgins, the men waiting for the master after the wedding feast - Luke 12:3ff)

APPLICATION

- What a fantastic lesson our Lord has illustrated for us in this parable! The servant wakes up before the Master and prepares what is needed for him to eat and everything else he may need for the day to get started, then the servant stays up late until the Master goes to bed to ensure that all has been taken care of-the servant's needs are not of first importance.

Our Obedience is Our Duty - We Are

3 Unprofitable Servants (Luke 17:9-10)

EXPLANATION

- "Followers of Jesus are unworthy servants who will never be able to make a claim upon God. Even the "best," these apostles, are sinners who have received forgiveness because of the blood of Jesus (Luke 22:20; Acts 20:28).
- And yet being saved by grace does not lessen the Christian's duty at all. In fact, it is through God's grace in the death of Jesus that he bought all believers as slaves. (Black)
- *The fact that Jesus will reward His servants is wholly a matter of God's grace. We do not deserve anything because we have obeyed Him and served Him.*
- As His servants, we must beware lest we have the wrong attitude toward our duties. There are two extremes to avoid: merely doing our duty in a slavish way *because we have to*, or doing our duty *because we hope to gain a reward*. (Wiersbe)

- The Christian is to be humble in his service or the Lord
 - James 4:10; "Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you."

- No matter what we do for Christ, it is our duty to do it
- We are unworthy (unprofitable) of the privilege to serve Him
- We are to count ourselves "*unprofitable servants*."
- No Christian can claim he has done all he should; we know this
- We call come short; no matter how much we do or how great the work
 - Romans 3:23; "we all fall short of the glory of God..."

- There is no room for pride or arrogance or boasting
 - Warning to Gentiles not to be arrogant, that just like God cut off the Jews from the vine, so the Gentiles can be cut off. Romans 11:20; "Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear"

- Luke 18:14; "I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other one; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."
- God commands perfection; therefore, He expects humility
 - Matthew 5:48; "Therefore you shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."
 - Matthew 18:4; "So whoever will humble himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

APPLICATION

"Finally, the shocking lesson that all we do, even the hard work we do for God, never for a moment puts God in our debt. How often do we hear it said (and how many more times is it thought): I've done all this, I've given all that money, I've worked so hard—surely God will be satisfied with that? The answer is that all genuine service to God is done from gratitude, not to earn anything at all. Saying 'We're not worth anything at all' doesn't mean that we lack a proper sense of self-worth and self-love. It just means that we must constantly remind ourselves of the great truth: we can never put God in our debt."
(Wright)

CONCLUSION

Rock of Ages

Amazing Grace

Plan of Salvation

We will always be unworthy servants! Thanks be to God for His amazing Grace!

Ephesians 2:4-7; " But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our wrongdoings, made us alive together with

Christ (by grace you have been saved),⁶ and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus,"

WORKS CONSULTED

Arnold, C. E. (2002). *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 1). Zondervan.

Black, M. C. (1995). *Luke*. College Press Pub.

Eaton, Doug. "Understanding the Parable of the Unprofitable Servants." *The Fight of Faith*, 2 May 2019, fightoffaithblog.com/2019/05/02/understanding-the-parable-of-the-unprofitable-servants/. Accessed 21 May 2022. So we are "unprofitable servants"—at least in this world. But notice that the master in Jesus' parable told his servant, "afterward you will eat and drink." In this simple statement we find a hint of an idea that Jesus makes explicit in Matthew 16:27—in the next world, Christ will "reward each according to his works." We must be careful with that phrase "according to." It does not mean that our works earn a reward. But God in His grace will distribute rewards according to our service—even though our works don't deserve it. This is a gracious distribution of rewards... (ibid)

"As you exegete scripture, you must always start with the context in which you find the passage. This parable is the response Jesus gives his disciples because they had requested more faith. Before Jesus begins to tell this parable, He lays two difficult commands on the disciples; first, he tells them not to cause anyone to stumble for it would be better to have a millstone tied around their necks and be thrown into the water; second, He tells them that they are to forgive anyone who wrongs them and asks for forgiveness, even if they do it seven times a day. In this context, seven represents the perfect number, which means there is no limit to how many times you are to forgive someone. It is these seemingly impossible commands that caused the disciples to ask Jesus for more faith, because they see the difficulty of the commands and understand their own weakness. As David Brown says, in the *Critical and Experimental Commentary*,

“What prompted so peculiar a petition? No doubt the felt difficulty of carrying into effect such holy directions—the difficulty first of avoiding offences and next of forgiving them so divinely.” (Brown, 298)

Jesus goes on to confirm their lack of faith by telling them that if they only had the faith of a mustard seed they would be able to do many wonders. This is used not only to humble them, but also to encourage them by showing the power of faith in Him. What they could never do themselves, would in fact be accomplished through faith. It is in this context that we find this parable, which cues us into the fact that faith has something to do with what Jesus wants to teach them.”

Edwards, J. R. (2015). *The Gospel according to Luke* (D. A. Carson, Ed.). William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Apollos. Even the apostles (v. 5)—apostles who may even consider themselves better than the Pharisees!—are still servants, and whatever they do as apostles is but service due their Lord. Conformity to God’s will does not lead to thoughts of “extra credit,” self-merit, or entitlement, but to humility; not to pride, but to joy!

Fifth Annual Firm Foundation Lectureship: September 21-25, 1988. *Luke “That You May Understand the Saviour” a Commentary - Exegetical, Homiletical*. 1988. Edited by William S. Cline, 1st ed., Austin, Texas, Firm Foundation Publishing House, Inc., 1988, pp. 419–425. Unprofitable Servants: J. Noel Merideth, pg. 419-425.

France, R. T. (2013). *Luke* (M. L. Strauss & J. H. Walton, Eds.). Baker Books. But the point is that the best we can do is still less than what we owe to God as our sovereign Lord; there is no place for preening and complacency in discipleship

Henry, Matthew, and Leslie F Church. *Matthew Henry’s Commentary : Genesis to Revelation*. Grand Rapids, Mich., Zondervan Pub. House, 1961. “God cannot be a gainer by our services, and therefore cannot be made a debtor by them. He has no need of us, nor can our services make any addition to his perfections.” It becomes us therefore to call ourselves unprofitable servants but to call his service a profitable service, for God is happy without us, but we are undone without him..

Leadership Ministries Worldwide. *The Preacher’s Outline & Sermon Bible : New Testament, King James Version*. Chattanooga, Tn, Leadership Ministries Worldwide, 1991.

Neusner, Jacob. *The Mishnah : A New Translation*. New Haven ; London, Yale University Press, 1988. He would say, “(1) If you have learned much Torah, (2) do not puff yourself up on that account, (3) for it was for that purpose that you were created.” - Rabban Yohanan b. Zakkai received [it] from Hillel and Shammai..

Smith, Bryan. *Holy Bible : New American Standard Bible, Brown, Goatskin Leather, Pitt Minion Reference Edition*. Cambridge Univ Press, 2010.

Sproul, R.C. “What Does It Mean to Be an “Unprofitable Servant?”” *Ligonier Ministries*, 23 June 2014, www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/what-does-it-mean-be-unprofitable-servant. Accessed 21 May 2022. If we serve out of an effort to earn our way into the kingdom of God, we’re deceiving ourselves. The motivation for Christian service is love for God. We serve not to earn salvation, but because Christ already has purchased salvation for us. That truth lies behind the verse in Augustus Toplady’s great hymn, “Rock of Ages,” that says, “Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling.” Toplady understood that after we have done our best deeds, we remain unprofitable servants. No matter how exemplary our service, we gain nothing by it that we can offer to God to procure His favor..

---. “What Does It Mean to Be an “Unprofitable Servant?”” *Ligonier Ministries*, 23 June 2014, www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/what-does-it-mean-be-unprofitable-servant. Accessed 21 May 2022. So we are “unprofitable servants”—at least in this world. But notice that the master in Jesus’ parable told his servant, “afterward you will eat and drink.” In this simple statement we find a hint of an idea that Jesus makes explicit in Matthew 16:27—in the next world, Christ will “reward each according to his works.” We must be careful with that phrase “according to.” It does not mean that our works earn a reward. But God in His grace will distribute rewards according to our service—even though our works don’t deserve it. This is a gracious distribution of rewards....

Wiersbe, Warren W. *Be Courageous : Take Heart from Christ’s Example : NT Commentary Luke 14-24*. Colorado Springs, Co, David C. Cook, 2010.

Wright, T. (2004). *Luke for Everyone*. Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.