

Parable Of The Unprofitable Servants

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Forerunner, "Bible Study," September-October 2004

When God calls us, we may take our newly found power of faith for granted and may be increasingly susceptible to becoming angry at offenses and persecution. Aware of this, Jesus sought to caution His apostles against such pitfalls. In Luke 17:1-6, Jesus sets up the Parable of the Unprofitable Servants with introductory instruction. He warns His disciples of the inevitable attacks on His teaching and on those who proclaim it, pointing out the guilt of those responsible (verses 1-2). Then He admonishes them to value a loving and forgiving attitude and to be ready to pardon when an offender repents. Knowing this is difficult and seeing this weakness in themselves, the apostles feel the need for an increase of faith, an additional amount of spiritual help to aid them in complying with Jesus' requirements.

The lesson in verses 1-6 unites with the parable in Luke 17:7-10, which emphasizes the obligation of each disciple to serve the Master without expectation of release or reward. His followers must give complete obedience to Him no matter what trials come upon them and like Him, they must conquer their own human nature by suffering. Jesus emphasizes the kind of faith His disciples would need to endure coming trials and to obey His commands (I Timothy 1:5). This parable is designed to guard against the subtle danger in the servant who becomes satisfied with his work and expects that the Master will recognize his service with reward. Jesus impresses on His disciples the difficult and continuous service He requires of them and the attitude in which their service should be given.

1. Would it be enough for Jesus merely to increase their faith as His apostles asked? Luke 17:5.

Comment: The apostles wanted more faith so they could meet the challenges of God's demands, but Jesus knew that it was not quantity they needed but quality. They did not need an increase of faith that would bring some reward following its use, but a faith that, although small like a mustard seed, is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1). The disciple with this type of living faith is convinced of the fact that God exists (Romans 4:16-22; Hebrews 11:1-3), conscious of his intimate relationship with God (Romans 5:1-2), and concerned about absolute submission to His will (Romans 12:2).

2. As servants, do we have to be subject to God in everything? Luke 17:7.

Comment: As servants or bondservants, we are not our own. We belong to Christ who bought us with His blood. We have no right of ownership of anything because God owns us and all we have—even our time. This means we are at His disposal. He demands our total effort at all times, and has every right to expect it as He has given all, owns all, and has a right to all. We are His by creation, by redemption, and by our surrender of our lives to Him.

The images of plowing fields and tending sheep in verse 7 represent spiritual labor, to which Christ called His own followers (John 21:16; Acts 20:28; I Peter 5:2-3). A master is not required to refresh or compensate his servant immediately, even when he has plowed his master's fields or fed his sheep. The servant has merely done his duty. Before

the servant can sit down and rest, he must prepare and serve his master's meal. Though tired, he is still under obligation to serve.

3. How much effort must be made for the Master? Luke 17:8.

Comment: From the master's point of view, all the servant had already accomplished was a matter of obligation, and now he demands further obedience and additional service from him. His needs must be satisfied first, and then at the proper time, the servant may eat. This represents our work on earth on our Master's behalf, giving Him the spiritual food and drink of seeing His Father's will accomplished (John 4:32-34). We are under obligation to Christ, and without delay and rest, we must present ourselves completely to Him in service (Romans 12:1).

4. Should a servant expect immediate praise or compensation for his obedience and service to the Master? Luke 17:9.

Comment: The only limit to the servant's duty is his master's will. There is no point at which we can claim that we have done enough and are entitled to ease. The servant is always a debtor of service; the master is never a debtor of reward. One who idolizes his duty may be satisfied when his duty is accomplished and expect the praise of others, but servants should not expect even thanks.

God promises us rewards, but we do not work for the Master simply to receive compensation. As servants, we serve Him because we are His to command as He wills and because we love Him. He has every right to our service and is under no obligation to thank us for our obedience. The servant does not serve for nothing, but receives consideration for the gift of salvation because of his dedicated obedience and humble service. Nevertheless, it is good for His servants to seek His praises and rewards with the right attitude because God does praise and reward the faithful (Colossians 3:23-24).

5. After serving the master, why is the servant still unprofitable? What is expected of us? Luke 17:10.

Comment: The lowly attitude of the servant is seen clearly in the word translated "servant" in verse 7. It is the Greek word *doulos* meaning "bondservant." During Christ's time, such a servant-slave was under the complete authority of his master. We must take this lowly position if we are going to serve our Master well. Our service will always fall short of the suffering and sacrifice Jesus received while in the flesh on earth. Therefore, there is no such thing as an excess of earned credit in us; even after serving our best at what the Master requires, we are still unprofitable servants in comparison to Christ. After performing our duty perfectly, we are still short of earned credit before God. We cannot build anything on our own effort. If we expect thanks and reward for fulfilling the minimum requirement of work, our thoughts are not on the duty but on what we may gain.

Christ expects every church member to do his duty in a mind and will unified with His. His emphasis on humility is a hard lesson for those who will not serve unless given recognition, honor, and position. In reality, much of the service we perform for Him is humbling and obscure by the world's standard. Christian works must be done in faith (James 2:20). The only way to obtain increased faith is for the working servant to

manifest steadfast, persevering obedience, grounded in humility with the help of the Holy Spirit. Faith is produced as a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22). A humble, obedient, serving attitude goes a long way to increasing faith and practicing true forgiveness.