

Did Jesus Teach That We Are All Unprofitable Servants?

Luke 17:10: (KJV) *So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.*



Every Christian will tell you that Jesus is the embodiment of righteousness, compassion and mercy. We all agree that his impact on the world came through his uncompromising actions of selfless love that led to sacrificing himself as a ransom for all of humanity. Couple these actions with his words of encouragement and uplift to any and all who would listen, and we have a model of how God's love should unfold within humanity. With this resume in hand, we need to examine Jesus' Parable of the Unprofitable

Servant, as it sounds like the exact opposite of all that Jesus stood for. In this parable, he seems to tell his followers that whatever they do in God's service is what is expected of them and nothing more. What did Jesus mean? How does this harmonize with the rest of his teachings?

Let's begin by reading the Parable of the Unprofitable Servant. It is short and to the point:

Luke 17:7-10: *7 Which of you, having a slave plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, Come immediately and sit down to eat? 8 But will he not say to him, Prepare something for me to eat, and properly clothe yourself and serve me while I eat and drink; and afterward you may eat and drink? 9 He does not thank the slave because he did the things which were commanded, does he? 10 So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.*

The parable seems to say that we are essentially indentured servants to God. We are given tasks and expected to fulfill them without fanfare or thanks. Our job is to do our job, and that's it.

The immediate context gives us a few other lessons to attach to this parable to help us understand what Jesus was driving at. The first six verses of Luke 17 highlight three specific lessons.

Jesus begins this part of the context by speaking to his disciples. We will see the importance of this later:

Luke 17:1-6: *1 He said to his disciples, It is inevitable that stumbling blocks come, but woe to him through whom they come! 2 It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea, than that he would cause one of these little ones to stumble.*



The first lesson is to be painfully aware of the serious sin of causing others to stumble.

3 Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. 4 And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, I repent, forgive him.



The second lesson is the importance of having a forgiving and compassionate heart.

The apostles respond with an interesting request to expand their faith, which we will expand on shortly:

5 The apostles said to the Lord, Increase our faith! 6 And the Lord said, If you had faith like a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, Be uprooted and be planted in the sea; and it would obey you.



The third lesson is that deep and abiding faith can alter our life circumstances.

This talks about a mulberry tree being uprooted and planted in the sea. A deep and powerful faith can change the landscape of our lives.

These are three significant lessons spoken with very few words to precede the Unworthy Servant parable. Why are these so briefly stated? Because they sum up a MUCH larger context. These lessons are likely given to the same audience as in **Luke 15** and **16** when Jesus spoke five parables to a mixed crowd.

Let's figure out how this works. Luke 15 sets the context. Jesus is surrounded by tax collectors, sinners, Pharisees, scribes and disciples:

Luke 15:1-3: *1 Now <1161> all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near him to listen to him. 2 Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, This man receives sinners and eats with them. 3 So he told them this parable...*

Jesus, beginning to frame the large context we mentioned, then delivered the Parables of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, the Prodigal Son, the Unjust Steward, and the Rich Man and Lazarus. These parables were spoken to all, especially to those considered lost (the tax collectors and the sinners) and to those who considered themselves to be the elite (the scribes and Pharisees). Jesus spoke to this same crowd through **Luke 15, 16** and **17** up through verse 10. **Luke 17:11** gives a specific indication of a complete change of venue.

How do we know it's all one context? By one word!



But/and/now: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #1161 *de deh*; a primary particle (adversative or continuative); but, and, etcetera

Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon: but, moreover, and, et cetera

**now = *and = *but*

This tiny word *now* can also mean “and,” “but,” “then” or “moreover.” It is used almost 3,000 times in the New Testament and generally indicates a continuation. When used in relation to Jesus’ preaching, it can be on one of two levels. It can be a continuation of the big picture of his ministry—it might indicate he was preaching in this area and “now” he continued preaching in another city. Such is the case above in **Luke 15:1-3**. *Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near him...* His location and audience changed, but his preaching continued. It was setting up a new context.

When this word for “and” is used in Luke 15:11, it shows us a continuation of the same physical context (their location) while adjusting the focus or content of his teaching:

Luke 15:11: *And <1161> he said, A man had two sons.*

And is the same word. He is in the same physical location here changes the focus to a new parable.

Luke 16:1: *Now <1161> he was also saying to the disciples, There was a rich man who had a manager, and this manager was reported to him as squandering his possessions.*

Again, he started with *Now*, picking up where he left off and going into the next parable that illustrates his point. This same transition word shows us he is going from piece to piece in the same context.

Luke 16:19: *Now <1161> there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day.*

Luke 16 ends with this Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, and we usually stop here at the end of these lessons in the five parables.



However, Luke 17 continues the context:

Luke 17:1: (KJV) *Then <1161> said he unto the disciples, It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come!*

From this, we can see **Luke 17** is just picking up where Jesus left off in the previous chapter. He is continuing to speak but changing the focus of whom he is speaking to.

The translators may not have broken up this conversation on purpose. They could have just been looking for a place to start a new chapter. That is an important piece of the puzzle, but it is very obvious that chapter 17 picks up exactly where the previous parable left off.

Another point is that Jesus' lessons were often bundled or intertwined to convey a greater message. When we see this Parable of the Unworthy Servant in the context of those previous five, it is a powerful message!

The next scripture begins an entirely new context:

Luke 17:11: *While he was on the way to Jerusalem, he was passing between Samaria and Galilee.*

We know something else is happening now—Jesus has picked up and is moving on. We have established, then, that the Parable of the Unworthy Servant (**Luke 17:7-10**) is in the same context as the two previous full chapters of Luke. This helps us to set the groundwork for understanding this parable.



Finding worthiness in our unworthiness:

To truly grasp the import of Jesus telling his disciples that they are “unworthy servants,” we need to know why.

It turns out that this parable is the culmination of a broad and piercing set of lessons that helped define how God’s plan of salvation would be put into place.

It is SO important to pay close attention to the context of all biblical teachings. Knowing the context helps us better grasp the meaning!

So, if this parable is built upon all of the teachings before it, how do we break down Jesus’ specific message to his disciples?

The best way to go about this is to observe how he communicated to his larger audience. Jesus had a breathtaking ability to not only read the thinking of those who were listening but also craft a response to their thoughts and reactions that could show them higher and more righteous ways of serving God.

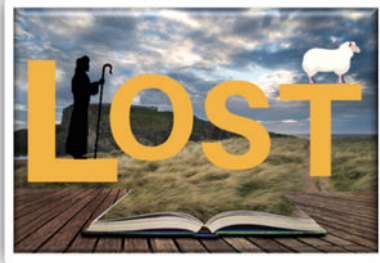
Jesus could read the crowd, including the scribes, Pharisees, sinners and the disciples! He could read what they were thinking and create these stories right then and there to meet the needs of all these listeners and show the more significant lessons.

As we approach the Parable of the Unprofitable Servant, let’s remember that Jesus’ attention here was turned specifically to his disciples. It is reasonable to conclude that what Jesus will say will serve as the conclusion for his lengthy teachings to that mixed audience of sinners, tax collectors, scribes, Pharisees and disciples in Luke chapters 15, 16 and the first part of chapter 17.

This conclusion would follow the theme Jesus began with— **SALVATION FOR ALL!**

He introduced this vital part of the gospel with the first two parables, representing the BIG PICTURE of this coming series of teachings.

The Parable of the Lost Sheep:



The one lost sheep represented the entire race of humanity. Jesus left his heavenly home, recovered it, and returned to heaven. All of God's family rejoices! This is a picture of the ransom sacrifice of Jesus.

The Parable of the Lost Coin:



A woman loses one coin from her complete set of 10, which causes her to go to any length to find it. This represents how the human race, as part of God's intelligent creation, was lost and needed to be found in order to restore the harmony between God and man! This parable is a picture of restitution.

The first two parables show the very big pictures—**ransom** and **restitution**. They set the groundwork for everything else Jesus is about to teach through the next three parables, his other comments and then the parable of the unworthy servant.

With this big picture in mind, let's begin with the three lessons we briefly touched on earlier and unfold their meaning in relation to previous teachings.



The first lesson is to be painfully aware of the serious sin of causing others to stumble.

Luke 17:1-2: *1 (Then) he said to his disciples, It is inevitable that stumbling blocks come, but woe to him through whom they come! 2 It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea, than that he would cause one of these little ones to stumble.*

Remember, this is right after the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. This new statement is: *It is inevitable that stumbling blocks come.* It alerts the listeners that there is a connection to that previous parable and Jesus is expanding his teaching.

While this lesson (being aware and not being one who causes others to stumble) was important to the disciples personally, they had also witnessed it in action.

Who had been and would soon be classic examples of what NOT to do regarding this lesson? THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES—they were still listening when Jesus turned his attention to his disciples.

We can imagine when Jesus turns his attention away from them to the disciples, the group of scribes and Pharisees possibly lean over, trying to hear what he is saying. Why wasn't he looking at them? What was going on over there? He has captivated them all, and they want to know the end of his teaching.

Let's drop in on part of the Parable of the Unjust Steward to see how Jesus illustrated these connections between the five previous parables.

Luke 16:2-3: *2 And he called him and said to him, What is this I hear about you? Give an accounting of your management, for you can no longer be manager. 3 The manager said to himself, What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me?...*

The Parable of the Unjust Steward:



Jesus is extending the warning, specifically to the Pharisees and scribes, about their overt neglect of the most important parts of God's favor to Israel. He is telling them how they should act in light of their soon-to-be-lost favor!

In the parable, the manager then went on to cleanup up the delinquent accounts he had neglected. The parable showed that the Pharisees had been neglectful of their flock—they were actually causing others to sin because they were not doing their job.

Jesus concluded the story:

Luke 16:9: *And I say to you, (he was speaking to his disciples, not to the Pharisees, even though he was speaking about what the Pharisees had done) make friends for yourselves by means of the wealth of unrighteousness, so that when it fails, they will receive you into the eternal dwellings.*

What does that mean? This doesn't sound right—*make friends...by means of the wealth of unrighteousness...?*

This is symbolic language and a bit difficult to understand. We investigated these parables in Episode #1081 and gave a lengthy explanation.

Here is a paraphrase of what Jesus is saying: *I tell you, my disciples, be merciful to and honest with all you have dealings—don't look down on those not in your position. (This is exactly what the Pharisees had already done.) Once this world and the comparably small responsibilities we bear in it passes, you will be received into a heavenly reward for being friends with and compassionate towards all those individuals who were in the midst of unrighteousness.*



The account rendered up for the scribes and Pharisees, like the manager in the parable, was a complete failure. They were supposed to be shepherds for the people, not to stand above them.

When we look at the beginning lesson of not causing others to stumble, it seems that Jesus may have linked it back to the Parable of the Unjust Steward. As we look at the context of the Parable of the Unworthy Servant, we constantly go back to what Jesus already said to build the foundation.



Finding worthiness in our unworthiness:

Sadly, The scribes and Pharisees were strong examples of neglecting a favored position of service to God.

As Jesus was wrapping up this lengthy period of teaching that he began with the message of salvation, he warned those who would soon be given God's favor—the disciples—to accept it with overwhelming humility in contrast to those they had seen as their leaders.

Jesus had told stories that zeroed in on the spiritual elite of Israel. Now he is talking to his disciples, reminding them of what he said before—*Pay attention to these lessons and see what you are supposed to stand for! You have to rise to a higher level.*

That was the first lesson.

These next comments are setting up for the Parable of the Unworthy Servant.



The second lesson is the importance of having a forgiving and compassionate heart.

Jesus continues:

Luke 17:3-4: *3 Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. 4 And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, I repent, forgive him.*

This is a powerful, straightforward lesson about forgiveness and a compassionate heart. These comments profoundly connect to the Parable of the Prodigal Son: The father represents God, the older son represents those of the Jewish people who outwardly kept the Law and traditions, and the younger son represents the “undesirables” in Israel, who were the tax collectors and sinners.

We drop into the parable when the older brother finds out that his rebellious younger brother has returned home:

Luke 15:25: *Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing.*

The older son finds out what has happened and is disgusted.

Luke 15:29–30: *29 But he answered and said to his father, Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and yet you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends; 30 but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.*

The lesson is simple—God, represented by the father, forgave that younger son. We should, therefore, be forgiving! Jesus had given them the reminder in that parable. Now, he is telling his disciples directly about their responsibilities.

We are absolutely obligated to forgive because that is the pattern we have been given. The scribes and Pharisees had been given the pattern of the Law, but they built new patterns, ways, traditions and rituals around it to make it more comfortable. Jesus tells them not to go down those roads. Do not be like the older son in the parable. We also have to look at Jesus' teachings and ask what our jobs are as his disciples.



Finding worthiness in our unworthiness:

As Jesus leads up to the unworthy servant parable, he reminds his disciples of the fundamental importance of forgiveness.

His point is that they generally came from those not regarded as special (the disciples were fishermen, tax collectors and zealots), and they needed to always keep the grace they had been given in the front of their minds.

This is the key. In the Parable of the Prodigal Son, the older son (representing the spiritual leaders) shows no grace or forgiveness. He then says, *If your brother comes to you seven times in a day and repents, you forgive him. Here is what I taught you before, and here is what I am teaching you now. You saw what the Pharisees did. Here is what you must do yourselves.*

Seeing these lessons unfold and relate to all Jesus had already taught makes them so much deeper—and we haven't even looked at the parable yet!

**So far, Jesus is focused on not stumbling others and being forgiving.
What comes next before the unworthy servant lesson?**

Next, we will see Jesus build the foundation for this final lesson in a very different way. He began with two very cautionary points:

1. Don't be a stumbling influence.
2. Be sure to maintain a forgiving mindset.

Jesus then continues with an inspiring and uplifting lesson on faith.

The apostles respond with a request for Jesus to increase their faith. Perhaps they wanted to be uplifted after the weightiness of the last two teachings. Whatever the reason, remember that the whole crowd could still hear what was being said. Jesus' attention was focused on his disciples, but the rest of the crowd was listening.



The third lesson is that deep and abiding faith can alter our life circumstances.

Luke 17:5-6: *5 The apostles said to the Lord, Increase our faith! 6 And the Lord said, If you had faith like a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, Be uprooted and be planted in the sea; and it would obey you.*

There are these short lessons. Jesus makes these lessons short because he has already laid out the basis for them in the previous parables. We just need to review his preceding lessons to see what he is referring to.



Jesus shows them what increased faith looks like. He teaches them that deep and abiding faith, even though it begins as a tiny seed, can change the landscape of our lives! Faith that doesn't look like much of anything, like a tiny mustard seed, can grow into a large tree.

That is how faith works. Jesus says that we do not need to have a lot up front, but we have to have the potential for it to grow.

With this faith, let's again go back to the connection with the Parable of the Prodigal Son:

Now let's focus on the wayward son coming back home and the faith it took for him to admit his sins and ask for mercy:

Luke 15:18-22: *18 I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.*

He rehearsed his "script" and knew exactly what he wanted to say.

20 So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. 21 And the son said to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.

He can't even finish his plea because his father interrupts him! He is ready, he has rehearsed, and he knows what is important. He plans to appeal to his father, but his father is so eager to welcome him home that he doesn't even let the son finish!

22 But the father said to his slaves, Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet;

The younger son had to humble himself to overcome his shame, which indicates repentance on his part. He needed to have faith in this father to have the courage to go back to him. His faith was tiny and trembling—he didn't ask for anything except to be treated as one of the hired men—but he had enough faith to journey back.

That is the faith, just like the mustard seed and the mulberry tree, which will move people to change the landscape of their lives. Through this parable, Jesus is showing them the walk of faith. It is such a profound lesson for us to hold onto. These small lessons are much bigger than what Jesus said because of what was taught before. All these previous parables showed the unfolding of the gospel truth. They laid out the ransom, restitution and then the fall of Israel through the next three parables. Those three were the examples they were NOT to follow. They were to follow the things that are worthy.



Finding worthiness in our unworthiness:

Great faith is rewarded with great blessing!

That blessing does not come because we are worthy;
it comes because we are first humbled and then welcomed
by God because of grace and despite our unworthiness.

The preceding parables are setting up that final Parable of the Unworthy Servant in a big way. Jesus has already furnished the backdrop of the other parables and the three lessons we just explored. We need to pause here and appreciate the tremendous wisdom and power Jesus used to draw this diverse crowd together, keep their attention and give lessons that all could look at and say, *He's talking about me. I don't like that.* He did that on purpose to catch their attention so they could see, learn and grow. The scribes and Pharisees, though, grumbled because they knew he was referring to them. They would try to attack him, and he would tell another story. That led him to the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus.

After all that Jesus had spoken to this mixed crowd, he now spoke directly to his disciples. He was wrapping up this period of teaching and preparing for his final lesson.

The three lessons were in place:



1. Not stumbling others
2. Being forgiving
3. Having faith that can grow

He set up this lesson with **Luke 15** and **16** and the first few verses of **Luke 17** and is now preparing for the big finale, the final lesson. For his disciples, this would be a powerful summation of who they were called to be.

Jesus begins by putting them into the master's position so they can feel the power of that authority:

Luke 17:7: *Which of you, having a slave plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, Come immediately and sit down to eat?*

Jesus' approach here enabled the disciples to think as the master of a slave would think: *no, the slave has more work to do, it's not yet time for him to eat.*

Jesus first focuses on the servant's labors outside of the house—*plowing in the field or tending sheep*. Where else do we see someone in the field? In the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

Let's look at the older son:

Luke 15:25-26: *25 Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things could be.*

The Parable of the Prodigal Son:



This son represented Israel's elite, those who outwardly kept the Law and traditions. Jesus shows us they were servants, only in place to do what God had bid them to do. But their hearts were not in the right place.

Through the Law, Israel's spiritual leaders were directed to do specific work in a particular way. Although they were "in the field" doing the work, they were not accomplishing their true mission because their hearts were not in the right place.

In the Parable of the Unworthy Servant, we see the servant's responsibilities as keeping the household running—plowing, tending sheep and tending the master's needs. Jesus is likely alluding to the gospel work his disciples would be called upon to do. Using their own experiences and looking at the example of the spiritual leadership at that time, they were shown what NOT to do. The actions of the scribes and Pharisees were not what Jesus was looking for. God wants something higher from us.

We know those in authority in Israel were to be shepherds of the people. We also know that it was prophesied that they would NOT fulfill their responsibilities:

Jeremiah 23:1–2: *1 Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of My pasture! declares the LORD. 2 Therefore thus says the LORD God of Israel concerning the shepherds who are tending My people: You have scattered My flock and driven them away, and have not attended to them; behold, I am about to attend to you for the evil of your deeds, declares the LORD.*

This prophecy tells us that there would come a time when God would deal with the shepherds of Israel. That time came when Jesus was on earth. He pointed out that the religious leaders were doing the work they had been appointed to do, but they were not doing it in a godly fashion; they were not properly shepherding their flock. Jesus used the examples of the scribes and Pharisees to illustrate to his disciples the wrong way to follow him.

The fields of the master must be plowed for seeds to be planted for the harvest!

John 4:35: *Do you not say, There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest.*

Jesus shows that plowing and shepherding—what the disciples were supposed to do— can be done incorrectly. He's telling his disciples about this unprofitable, unworthy servant parable and showing them examples.



Finding worthiness in our unworthiness:

As servants, we are called upon to do the work of the Gospel.

The fact that the tasks in this parable were ongoing and repetitive shows us that what is required of Jesus' disciples is work that will always need to be done. This is our job!

The spiritual leaders of Jesus' day did not do what God would have had them to do.

Here we are beginning to see the responsibilities of discipleship. There is always work to do, and it is not easily accomplished!

**Now, we finally approach the part where Jesus says we are unworthy.
What did he really mean by that?**

We have invested significant time building the foundation for this most powerful point. Thus far, we have seen Jesus' focus on understanding what was happening around his disciples with their religious leadership. He would now show them how they needed to be different when it became their time to preach, teach and directly serve God.

Returning to the parable:

Luke 17:7: *Which of you, having a slave plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, Come immediately and sit down to eat?*

Okay, you have fulfilled your external tasks, and now it is time to fulfill your internal tasks:

Luke 17:8: *But will he not say to him, Prepare something for me to eat, and properly clothe yourself and serve me while I eat and drink; and afterward you may eat and drink'?*

The servant is to prepare the master's meal, clean himself up, look presentable and serve.

Jesus is teaching his disciples that their work in service to God encompasses serving not only the household, but also directly serving the master. Remember, the master pictures God. This service, this praise, is as important as the servant's other work, and he is required to do it respectfully.

Clean yourself up and properly clothe yourself—this reminds us of the high priest in the Tabernacle putting on new garments. This is the “praise” aspect of working.

We have another reference to Jesus' previous parables. Let's look at the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus in relation to this part of the Parable of the Unprofitable Servant.

The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus:



The Rich Man pictured the Pharisees and ruling class as representatives of all Israel, and Lazarus (whom God helps) represented all nations of the world outside of God's favored people. Jesus taught that Israel was about to lose favor with God (being close to Abraham), and the Gentiles (Lazarus the beggar) were about to gain that favor. Why? Because the rich man was self-serving and not God-serving.

Luke 16:19–21: *19 Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. 20 And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, 21 and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores.*

The rich man seems to be oblivious to everything else around him. He is self-absorbed, happy with his life, joyously living in splendor. That is not what service to God is about.

Jesus is saying, *Don't get so self-absorbed that you are living in splendor because you are chosen of God.* While this parable is short, it is powerful because it is built on two chapters of parables that show the importance of living up to what Jesus expected us to.

Luke 17:9: *He does not **thank** <5485> the slave because he did the things which were commanded, does he?*

Thank: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #5485 *charis*; graciousness (as gratifying), of manner or act (abstract or concrete; literal, figurative or spiritual; especially the divine influence upon the heart, and its reflection in the life; including gratitude):—acceptable, benefit, favour, gift, grace(-ious), joy, liberality, pleasure, thank(-s, -worthy)

It seems like the master could at least have thanked his slave. But if you understand the correct meaning of the word *thank*, the master's reaction begins to make sense.

This word for *thank* is the same word for *grace*, which has an entirely different meaning. Here are two examples:

Luke 2:40: *The child (Jesus) continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the **grace** <5485> of God was upon him.*

Luke 6:32–33: *32 If you love those who love you, what **credit** <5485> (or what **grace**) is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. 33 If you do good to those who do good to you, what **credit** <5485> (or what **grace**) is that to you? For even sinners do the same.*

Jesus is saying that everyone loves those who love them—the world already does this. But as disciples, we are commissioned to show grace (favor) to others beyond what the world shows. As Christians, we are to look for something higher. In the parable, Jesus is saying the master does not attribute higher character to the servant just because the servant is doing what he is supposed to do. We need to show excessive diligence in how we approach our “jobs” in Christ, but we are not to develop an attitude thinking we are special.

Focus! Do all of what we are commissioned to do simply because it needs doing!

Luke 17:10: *(The conclusion of the parable) So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.*

Here is the final lesson: there is nothing that any of us could bring to the table to indicate that we should be the ones chosen by God to do His work. It is ONLY by God's grace and Jesus' sacrifice that we could be considered worthy, not from any merit we have in ourselves.

As disciples of Jesus, we are commissioned with the serious work of following in Jesus' footsteps. To be clear, we are not even worthy of this position:

Romans 3:9–10: *9 ...Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; 10 as it is written, THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE;*

However, the religious leaders of Jesus' time saw themselves as righteous. They saw themselves as elite and worthy, having all the right credentials. Jesus gave us the opposite message: we are not to be like those leaders.

We are to raise ourselves higher by bringing ourselves lower. He wants us to gladly do the work before us, realizing the privilege we have in doing it.

The religious leaders of Jesus' time also saw themselves as highly qualified. In contrast, our resume among our fellow humans is NOT impressive:

1 Corinthians 1:27–29: *27 but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, 28 and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, 29 so that no man may boast before God.*

There is no caste system in Christ. We are all in the same category. We must not put ourselves above our service. The spiritual leadership of Israel put themselves as shepherds above the sheep they were supposed to be serving. Jesus is saying do not do that; just serve. This is how he approached his own life. He did not say he was great; his entire focus was to honor God by speaking and doing the things God had told him to do.



Finding worthiness in our unworthiness:

Being called to serve God is a privilege completely beyond our rank.

Pleasing God and earning His favor **ONLY** come through the merit of Jesus' sacrifice. Let us humbly engage in all that God puts before us, realizing that we are simply doing what is expected of us.

Rick's
Perspective

From a personal perspective, Jonathan, you and I have worked together with Christian Questions for 26 years now. And I know that along the way we've had a lot of ups and downs. One of the things I appreciate very much is that along the way, there have been times where you would say to me, you know, Rick, just be careful. Just be careful. We don't want to get ahead of ourselves. We don't want to get bigger in our own eyes because we've been given an incredible, wonderful privilege. It's so important to just help each other be full of the Lord, not ourselves. You can't be full of both. It doesn't work.

There is a glorious ending to all of this. All our efforts to comply with what is expected of us will be met with powerful grace and acceptance at the end of our course. Let's drop in from just two lines from the Parable of the Talents, which takes place at the end of the work of all of these servants when the master returns.

The Parable of the Talents:



Matthew 25:21: His master said to him, Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.

If we continue to honor and praise the Lord and fulfill our spiritual responsibilities to “plow the field,” we will enter into the joy of our Master. This parable helps to put everything in perspective, especially when we look at all of the previous parables—the Parable of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, the Prodigal Son, the Unjust Steward, the Rich Man and Lazarus and the Unworthy Servant. The Parable of the Unworthy Servant says, do what's put before you and honor God with every moment. If faithful unto death, you will receive a crown of life (**Revelation 2:10**).

May God be praised in everything we say and do!

**So, did Jesus teach that we are all unprofitable servants?
For Rick and Jonathan and Christian Questions...
...Think about it!**

All scriptures cited are from the NASB1995 translation unless otherwise noted.



Next episode

Episode 1360:
What is God's Will, and How Do I Make it My Will?



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Text CQREWIND to 22828
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Bonus Material and Study Questions

Recommended additional study:

Ep.1079: Does God Really Love Humanity? (Part I)

How the Lost Sheep and Lost Coin stories teach us God's character

<https://christianquestions.com/parables/1079-parables-humanity-part-i/>

Ep. 1081: Does God Really Love Humanity? (Part II)

Prodigal Son/Unjust Steward – teach us what NOT to do with God's favor

<https://christianquestions.com/parables/1081-prodigal-son-unjust-steward/>



Parents and Bible class teachers, continue your studies on this topic with these short, animated videos for kids at ChristianQuestions.com/YouTube:

- **Who were the scribes and the Pharisees?**
<https://christianquestions.com/cq-videos/videos-cq-kids/who-were-the-scribes-pharisees/>
- **Why did Jesus speak in parables?**
<https://christianquestions.com/cq-videos/videos-cq-kids/speak-parables/>

Reviewing two different translations:

Luke 17:1–10: *1 He said to his disciples, It is inevitable that stumbling blocks come, but woe to him through whom they come! 2 It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea, than that he would cause one of these little ones to stumble. 3 Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. 4 And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, I repent, forgive him. 5 The apostles said to the Lord, Increase our faith! 6 And the Lord said, If you had faith like a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, Be uprooted and be planted in the sea; and it would obey you. 7 Which of you, having a slave plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, Come immediately and sit down to eat? 8 But will he not say to him, Prepare something for me to eat, and properly clothe yourself and serve me while I eat and drink; and afterward you may eat and drink? 9 He does not thank the slave because he did the things which were commanded, does he? 10 So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.*

Luke 17:1–10: (KJV) *1 Then said he unto the disciples, It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come! 2 It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones. 3 Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. 4 And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him. 5 And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith. 6 And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you. 7 But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? 8 And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and*

serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? 9 Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. 10 So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.

(Source: Bible Commentary from James Burton Coffman) Hobbs thought the four sayings might be entitled 'Four things of which the Christian should beware.' These were enumerated by him as 'the sin of tempting others, ... the {Luke 17:1–2} sin of an unforgiving spirit, ... the {Luke 17:3–4} sin of overlooking the power of faith in this, ... and {Luke 17:5–6} the sin of supposing that one may merit salvation. {Luke 17:7–10} We fully agree with Hobbs that there are four pronouncements here, not merely two, as indicated by the paragraphing in the English Revised Version (1885). The Pharisees, who were constantly on the fringe of every audience Jesus ever addressed, were at that very moment trying to cause the Twelve themselves to stumble; and Jesus spoke in the sternest manner against those who would pervert the faith of others.

Study QUESTIONS

Ep. 1359: Did Jesus Teach That We Are All Unprofitable Servants?

<https://christianquestions.com/parables/1359-unprofitable-servant/>

See:  **CQ Rewind**
SHOW NOTES

1. How does the Parable of the Unprofitable Servant seem to show the opposite of what we know is Jesus' character of love and compassion? (See Luke 17:7-10)
2. Looking at the context of Luke 17:1-6, what are three lessons that Jesus is seeking to convey? How do the apostles respond to Jesus after the second lesson? (See Luke 17:5-6)
3. To whom was Jesus speaking these verses? What is the previous context of the parables starting in Luke 15? How do we know these chapters are connected and are all one context?
4. How do the Parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin represent salvation for all mankind? How does Jesus' mention of the stumbling blocks in Luke 17:1-2 relate to the actions of the scribes and Pharisees? (See Luke 15:1-10)
5. What is the lesson for the disciples in the Parable of the Unjust Steward? What should be our attitude as Christians as we accept God's favor? (See Luke 16:1-13)
6. How does the Parable of the Prodigal Son illustrate Jesus' lesson on forgiveness? Why are we obligated to forgive? (See Luke 15:11-32, 17:3-4)
7. What is Jesus telling us about faith in Luke 17:5-6? In the Parable of the Prodigal Son, how did the younger son's actions reveal his own humility and his faith in his father? (See Luke 15:18-22)
8. Contrast the references to plowing in the fields in the Parable of the Unworthy Servant and the Parable of the Prodigal Son. What is the meaning of the differences in perspective? How do these parables illustrate what is pleasing to God? When was the prophecy in Jeremiah 23:1-2 fulfilled? (See Luke 17:7, 15:25-26)
9. What are the two important aspects of serving the Lord? In the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, how did the rich man's attitude and actions cut him off from God's favor? (See Luke 17, 7-8, 16:19-31)
10. How does the true meaning of the word "thank" in Luke 17:9 help to explain the Parable of the Unprofitable Servant? Summarize the lesson of this parable.
11. What must we always remember about our worthiness in having the privilege to serve the Lord?