

Difficult Commandments

Introduction. "This is an hard saying; who can hear it?" (John 6:60). This was said by many after Jesus had taught them about the bread of life (John 6:53-56). They could not understand it because they were too carnally-minded. We do not literally eat His flesh and drink His blood, but we assimilate Him by taking His word into our hearts (James 1:21).

From that time, many of His disciples went home and no longer followed Him (John 6:66), but Peter made a marvelous confession at that time (John 6:67-68).

As we look in the Bible, there are a lot of instances where the will of God was difficult to do. Nonetheless, we see the determination of faithful people who dealt with very difficult commands. They give us strength and encouragement to carry out whatever God requires of us.

I. ***Difficult Commandments In The Old Testament***

A. Genesis 22:1-2.

1. Without murmuring or complaining, Abraham set in his heart to do as he was commanded. We wonder how he may have felt when he was questioned by Isaac (Genesis 22:7).
2. Abraham was ready to carry out God's command, thinking that God would take care of the matter (Hebrews 11:17-19).

B. Exodus 14:21-22.

1. God told Moses to lift up his rod and stretch it over the sea so it would be divided. Can you imagine how the Israelites felt walking through the Red Sea?
2. They did what was commanded, trusting in good results (Hebrews 11:29). The Egyptians followed, and were destroyed.

C. Hosea 1:2-3.

1. Hosea was commanded to take an adulterous woman as a wife.
 - a) As was expected, she was not faithful to her husband.
 - b) The third child was named, "Not mine." Evidently, her baby was not Hosea's.
2. God made a comparison of Hosea's wife to the Israelites (Hosea 2:5).
3. Later, after Hosea's wife had been used by her so-called lovers, she was being sold on the auction block as a slave. Hosea was commanded to go get her.

D. Jonah 1:1-3.

1. To go preach to the Ninevites was a hard command because they were the hated enemies of the Israelites. The Ninevites were noted for their cruelty to their captives.

2. Jonah wanted them dead! He did not want to preach to them, because if they repented, God would be merciful to them (Jonah 4:2-3).

II. ***Difficult Commandments Of Jesus***

A. Matthew 5:28-30.

1. Here, as in reference to murder, Jesus legislates against the thought which lies in back of the act. He cuts off sin at its lowest root.
2. The essence of all sin is intention. Looking with lust is the same as adultery and those who indulge in it are guilty before God (2 Peter 2:14).

B. Matthew 5:31-32.

1. The law in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 was given because of the hardness of the people's heart, i.e., to prevent greater evils (Matthew 19:8-9).
2. It is hard to sit across from a couple and tell them that if they marry it will result in adultery or tell them that the only way to remedy a sinful marriage is to divorce.
3. This is such a difficult and emotionally trying commandment, that many erroneous divorce and remarriage doctrines have been devised to alleviate the difficulty.

C. Matthew 5:38-39.

1. This initial command, found in Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:20, and Deuteronomy 19:21, was given to regulate the decisions of judges.
2. However, the Jews had made this a rule by which to take revenge. We are not to set ourselves against the evil person injuring us (John 18:22-23).
3. We cannot control what others do, but we can control what proceeds from within us (Romans 12:19-21).

D. Matthew 5:43-44.

1. The command from Matthew 5:43 comes from Leviticus 19:18, but the Israelites were to drive out the people around them (Exodus 34:11-16; Deuteronomy 7:2).
2. The exact meaning of the term "love" is best understood in the light of some examples (Luke 10:35-37; 23:34; Acts 7:60). Could you love someone like the Samaritan, Jesus, or Stephen?

III. ***Difficult Commandments Of Paul***

A. Galatians 6:1.

1. There will always be brethren who are weak and/or have sinned in local congregations. They can be disappointing and frustrating.

2. These brethren should not be left alone, but should be encouraged and built up so that they might be saved (1 Thessalonians 5:14).
 3. Elders can really excel here by building up the flock using the scriptures (1 Peter 5:2; cf. Acts 20:32; 1 Thessalonians 4:18).
- B. Galatians 6:9-10.
1. Continually doing good is a mark of a child of God and is following the example of Christ (Acts 20:35).
 2. Brethren helped saints who were poor (Acts 4:32-35; Hebrews 6:10). We need to practice our own private benevolence too (1 Timothy 6:17-18). We must have faith that God will not "do us in" when we help other people.
- C. 1 Thessalonians 5:8-9.
1. Remaining sober will entail many difficulties, trials, and adversities. However, our perseverance will result in eternal life.
 2. Fighting is never easy (2 Corinthians 10:3-5; 2 Timothy 2:3-5), and it is so easy to quit! But persistence is for the strong, not the weak (Romans 5:1-5; 1 Peter 1:6-9).
 3. No one knows when the Master will come, so we must be prepared at all times (Matthew 24:44-51).
- D. 2 Thessalonians 3:6-7.
1. Withdrawing from the disorderly was commanded to the Roman, Thessalonian, and Corinthian churches (Romans 16:17-18; 1 Corinthians 5:4).
 2. It is easy to let this command slide because it involves stress and difficulty. This would become especially difficult when a family member is involved.

Conclusion. I have never heard of anyone letting the difficulty of learning to ride a bike or to drive a car deter them from the challenge. There is a story about a man standing on a crowded bus. The young man standing next to him asked, "What time is it?" The man refused to reply. The young man moved on. The man's friend, sensing something was wrong, asked, "Why were you so discourteous to the young man asking for the time?" The man answered, "If I had given him the time of day, next he would want to know where I am going; and then we would talk about our interests; and, if we did that, he would invite himself to my house for dinner; and, if he did, he would meet my lovely daughter; and, if he met her, they would both fall in love, and I do not want my daughter marrying someone who cannot afford a watch."

In view of all these examples, are we also determined to faithfully obey God? If we think that some command is too hard, do we think God wants us to simply disregard it? We must meet the challenges as set before us by God. God requires faith, repentance, confession, and baptism. Repen-

tance is a hard command, but virtually nothing that is good is free. When the Lord calls on us to repent and change our lives, let us meet the challenge.