

Christian Duty

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[0:00] Well, we're going to spend just this one week on a study of a four-letter word. It's D-U-T-Y. And it's not a dirty word at all. But I think its reputation has been smirched. And it's often regarded as a dirty word.

Even in evangelical circles, I've read books, and heard sermons and conversations that are forever seeming to take a swipe at duty.

As if it's somehow beneath the Christian to be told of his duty. Something negative. To think that we're doing things because it's my duty to do so.

So some of the issues we want to just touch upon today is, is it my duty as a Christian to keep God's law? Is it my duty?

[1:03] We'll come to them, Lou. But I'm just telling you some of the questions we're going to bring up. Is it my duty as a Christian to obey God's commandments?

Another one that we'll look at. Should I ever do things with a sense that this is my duty? And what other motivations should urge me to my duties?

So those are some of the questions swirling around this word duty. And I believe when much of the evangelical culture that we live in holds muddled and mistaken views on such things, it behooves us to come back to the Scriptures and to think clearly about these things.

So I want us to start with a definition of duty. How would you define duty? What are we talking about this morning? I'd like your input throughout our lesson today if you would put your thinking caps on. What is a duty? Doing something we're commanded to do. Anybody want to add to that? What is a duty?

[2:15] It's a responsibility. It's another synonym. An obligation. Could be a call to action, but it's a call to actions that we owe, isn't it?

It's something we ought to do. It's something we should do. Something we are bound to do, either morally or legally or otherwise.

Those are common dictionary answers and they will suit us for our purposes this morning. That's the way the Bible uses it. Now, here's the next question.

What is the foundation of our duty to God? What does our duty rest upon? Why are we obligated to God at all?

Okay? He bought us. Alright? He commands us. I'm not asking you what is our duty. I'm asking you what is the ground of our duty.

[3:25] Why are we obligated to obey God? Because of our salvation. Pardon? Now we're getting back way down at the bedrock of our foundation.

Even before we were saved. Even before His blood bought us. Roger says, He's the Creator. Okay, now why does that obligate me to God?

He owns us. He deserves worship, praise, obedience. Okay?

If He made, designed, owns us, does that not give Him certain prerogatives and authority over what He has made?

Do we not speak of the potter's rights to do with whatever He makes? And God is the potter. We are the clay. So, we're talking about this.

[4:28] I think, yeah, I think all that you've said is true, but I think Roger has hit on the very bedrock foundation. Before we were even sinners, what was our obligation to God?

Why were we duty bound to this God? Well, it's because He made us. Now, can you give me any scriptural proof of that idea that because God made us, we are obligated to obey Him?

Okay. So, we go back to the beginning. We start reading our Bibles. And in Genesis 1, we read that God created us. And a little later in chapter 1, and again in chapter 2, we find God commanding us.

As if the one is foundational to the other. That because you are my creatures, I now give you a command. And then in chapter 3, what do we see God?

We see God enforcing His commands. So, it's not just an imagination in God's mind that since He's Creator, we're obligated to obey Him. No.

[5:32] If we don't obey Him, He enforces His commandments. So, there is, right at the very beginning of our Bibles, established this Creator-Creature relationship.

The creatures owe obedience to the Creator. They owe service to the Creator. It's bound up in who we are as a man, a woman, in the image of God, and who God is as our Creator.

Any other places in Scripture? Scripture? Psalm 100? What part of it? Okay. So, there's the command first, isn't there, to worship Him.

How does the psalm begin? Shout for joy. And why? Because He's our Maker. He made us. We owe Him this joy and worship.

And it's predicated upon the fact that He's our Maker. We're His. We didn't make ourselves. Steve, you had a verse. Okay.

[6:36] That same idea. Ed's quoting, too. It has more to do with redemption. But the principle is true that we're in 1 Corinthians 6. You are not your own.

You were bought with a price. Therefore, glorify God with your body. The idea is that you're not your own. Well, as Jackie just quoted from Psalm 100, that psalm teaches us that we're not our own because God is our Maker.

So, if He made us, we're His. Not even dealing with redemption. So, we're His by creation. And then we're His because He bought us with His own blood.

So, we're twice His. But on both accounts, we owe Him glory from our bodies, from our lives. So, what have we seen?

We've seen that it is our duty to obey God. And that duty is rooted in our sense that we are His creatures. And He has ownership, rights, authority to command how we think and live.

[7:45] Now, here's the next question. Is this foundation of your duty to God only true when you're lost? Or does it continue after you're saved?

Is it still your duty as a saved Christian to keep God's commands? It's not a trick question, Evie.

Yes, and why do you say it with such emphasis?

Okay, that's one of probably hundred verses that we could turn to. In other words, when we were saved, did it change our status as creatures of this Creator?

Not at all. We're still creatures. We're redeemed creatures. But we are still God's creatures. And so, we still owe Him obedience. Not for our justification and our standing before Him as righteous.

That alone we get from Christ's obedience. But salvation doesn't make us non-creatures, does it? We still are His creatures.

[8:52] He still is the one who has made us, and therefore we are duty-bound by the very fact that He made us to obey and serve Him.

Salvation does not diminish in the least the Creator's rights to command us or the creature's duty to obey. And if you think otherwise, you will find as a Christian that when you don't obey, He comes after you with discipline.

Loving discipline as a Father. But it's still the point. We owe, we are obligated, we have a duty to obey our Heavenly Father. He is our Maker.

Now, with that gone, and then with that behind us, here's the next question. And we're pressing on further and further in. Should the Christian then live with a sense of duty?

If it is our duty, and we are obligated to God to obey Him, should the Christian live with a sense, a felt sense, that I am duty, I owe God obedience?

[10:02] Yes? Yes? Right. It's what we owe. Something we owe to God. Good.

We're called slaves of God. No longer slaves of sin, but slaves of God. And slaves have duties to please their Master. Roger. Good. Again, the lordship, servant, relationship shows again, there are duties.

And so, if it is our duty to obey God, it is only right that we should have a sense of that. Right? In fact, it would be wrong for us not to sense our duty to God.

So, becoming a Christian, or as a Christian, you have additional reasons to obey, but not less.

You're still a creature under this God, but now you have additional reasons.

This God has saved me. At the cost of His own Son. I'll live for Him, who died for me. And so, you have additional things, reasons to do your duty, but not less.

[11:10] Now, societal views have really shifted on this matter of duty. Some of you know the Boy Scout oath begins, on my honor, I will do my best to do my duty to God, and my country.

And in better years, we understood that we have duties to God and country, and it was thought a good thing, not only to know that, but to be resolved to fulfill those duties to God and to country. But, there is something independent running right through our flesh that doesn't like to be told what to do, and that certainly is gaining sway in our society at large.

We would not have anyone tell us what to do, and when to do it. But, sadly, that same spirit toward duty has been carried into the church, and there are many Christians that don't like to hear about their duties.

Now, the Bible speaks of our duties and our obligations many, many times. I just, we don't have time to look at all of these verses, but turn to Luke 17.

[12:20] We'll look at some of the more pertinent ones that spell out for us the fact that we as Christians not only have the duty to obey and serve God, but we ought to feel that duty.

Yes, we ought to be motivated by that duty. Luke chapter 17 and verses 7 through 10. Suppose one of you had a servant.

Here we are, back to the servant word. Plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, come along now and sit down to eat? Would he not rather say, prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink.

After that, you may eat and drink. Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? Now, that's Jesus' story on the human element.

But now, he shifts it to our responsibility as servants of God. And he's talking to his apostles here.

[13:26] So don't shirk this off as something that he's talking about unbelievers. No, he's verse five. It's to the apostles. So he shifts it to the apostles. So you also, Christian, when you have done everything you were told to do, you should say, we are unworthy servants.

We have only done our duty. We've only done our duty. So the Christian still has duties. And it's what we ought to have done.

It's what was our obligation. And Jesus is saying, that's why we can never put God in our debt. We can never by our obedience, earn a reward and make God say, oh, now I owe you something because you've done something for me.

No, we've only done what our, was our duty from the first moment of our existence. We're a creature. God's the creator. He commands.

We're servants. So even if we could obey perfectly, all we could say is we've only done our duty. Well, we can't even say that, can we? We have to come and plead the blood of Christ because we haven't done our duty.

[14:35] But, but see this passage as showing that duty is something that we as disciples of Christ still have toward God.

Any questions on that passage or on that? Seeing that here. Let's go over to Romans 14. The apostle Paul, one of the Lord's servants, speaks of his debt and his duty, his obligation.

There's two chief Greek words that are used in, in most all of these passages, and we won't get into that. But again, it's the words that speak about what we owe, our obligation, our duty, what we're bound to do, what we ought to do.

And here in Romans 14, Paul says, I am obligated. I am obligated. I have a duty. Both to Greeks and non-Greeks.

Both to the wise and to the foolish. Paul had been given the gospel. And he'd been charged to preach it to all nations, regardless of what kind of people they were.

[15:48] Educated, uneducated, refined, and rough around the edges. Well, these non-Greeks were the barbarians. They were the non-cultured people. And Paul says, I feel my duty.

I feel my obligation. My debt. I'm a debtor, is the way that the old King James, I believe, translated this. I'm under divine obligation to preach the gospel.

Indeed, he says in another place, woe to me if I do not preach the gospel. I'm simply discharging the trust that's committed to me. So it doesn't merit a reward.

Lord, should we ever do things because it's our duty? Should our duty ever motivate us? Well, it clearly motivated Paul to preach the gospel at Rome. He says in the very next verse, that is why I'm

so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome.

Why? Because I'm obligated. I'm under a debt. I'm under this, I owe it to God and to the world to preach the gospel. And that made him eager to do his duty.

[16:52] So, yes, a sense of our duty is a biblical motivation for doing things. And Paul did his duty with eagerness of heart. Don't ever make doing your duty and eagerness of heart opposites.

They aren't. Paul shows us that here. They're meant to go together. Duty is not an enemy to eagerness and wholehearted service.

Some people say, well, if you do something because it's your duty, it means you do it grudgingly with little heart. Well, it wasn't that way with the Apostle Paul. He did it eagerly because it was his duty. And it was that way with the Lord Jesus Himself.

There is this sense of obligation in our Lord. As you read through the Gospels, He has this sense of duty that drives Him and keeps Him from swerving to the right or to the left.

I always do what pleases My Father, He says. The world must know that I always do what pleases the Father. And He says to the Father, I have finished the work You gave Me to do.

[17:55] I have done My duty. He loved His Father. And love and duty are not enemies, but friends. As someone has already said, because if You love Me, You will do My commands, Jesus said.

You will fulfill Your duties and obligations to Me. So, do you always have your hearts just hot and brimming over with love and gratitude motivating you to do every commandment that God gives you?

You say, no, I wish I did, but I find my heart sometimes is cool. And I find my heart sometimes is just downright hard and stubborn. Well, it's most helpful, especially then, to have a strong sense of your duty to save you from going AWOL on God.

And many times, it is that sense of duty that has kept us on the road, kept us between the ditches. It's not a minus.

It's not something negative. It's something very valuable and something we ought to pray that God would increase this sense of our duty to our God. Yes, pray for more love and more gratitude and more zeal for God's glory, but pray also for a stronger sense of your duty to God.

[19:16] I believe it was largely that that kept Joseph out of Potiphar's bed. As you read in Genesis 39, 9, and she has tempted him and he says, my master, speaking of Potiphar, your husband, has withheld nothing from me except you because you are his wife, how then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?

You see, he had an awareness that I am obligated. I'm obligated to my master Potiphar, but I have an obligation, a higher obligation to God.

How could I do that to Potiphar when he's put everything in my trust except you? And how could I do that against God? He felt duty both ways and it kept him out of bed.

And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her. So a sense of duty is the friend of the Christian. Don't poo-poo it. Don't downplay it. Don't denigrate it.

Embrace it. Pray for more of it. Romans 8, 12. Another passage in God's Word that speaks of an obligation or a duty that we have.

[20:31] Here, Paul says, therefore, brothers, we have an obligation, but it's not to the sinful nature to live according to it.

Now, this whole passage in Romans 8 is a passage on the flesh and the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, the sinful nature and the Holy Spirit. And Paul is saying our obligation is not to the flesh, but to the Holy Spirit.

We have an obligation to the Spirit. Has the Holy Spirit set us free from the law of sin and death as he says back in verse 2 through the blood of Christ? Has the Holy Spirit come to indwell us?

Then we have an obligation to Him. And it's not to live according to the flesh, but to live according to the Spirit to be governed and directed by Him. And it's this very obligation and duty that Paul appeals to as a motive for why we as Christians should not live according to what the flesh dictates in our lives.

It's why we should put to death the misdeeds of the body. We're to feel our duty to the Holy Spirit as a motivation for living a holy life.

[21:42] Now, it's not the only motive. He also says we ought to fear death. Because if you don't live unto the Spirit and put to death the misdeeds of the body, you'll die. And the death is not physical death only.

It's talking about separation from God. There's another reason. There's also the gracious reward of life. These are further motivations, but they are not motivations that undo this motivation of duty.

Brothers, we have an obligation to live a holy life. We have that obligation to the Holy Spirit. That's what he's saying. So, there are lots and lots of verses that use the word ought.

The word ought. There's an oughtness, we might say, to the Christian life. We ought to do certain things and we ought not do other things. And the Bible is just loaded with such passages.

You remember, then Peter and the other apostles answered and said in Acts 5.29, we ought to obey God. We ought to obey God rather than men.

[22:47] Maybe your translation, we must obey God. It's the same word. We owe, we ought, we must. It is absolutely essential and necessary. There is this oughtness.

when being threatened with physical harm and warned to speak no more in Jesus' name, it was their sense of duty that kept them from caving in to the fear of persecution.

We heard what you said, that if we keep preaching in the name of Jesus, you're going to persecute us, but we ought. We have a duty to God. And so we'll obey Him rather than you.

You see how a sense of duty was such a friend to the apostles on that occasion. Ephesians 5.28, and in this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies.

Husbands, you have a duty to your wife. The Bible says so. You ought to love her as you love your own body. 2 Thessalonians 3.7, you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example.

[23:51] We were not idle when we were with you. So He's reminding them of their duty. You have this oughtness to follow our example and not be idle. 1 Timothy 3.15, if I'm delayed, you will know how people ought.

This is why He wrote 1 Timothy, so that you might know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, in the church, the pillar and ground of the truth. There are duties that people have concerning the church.

And that's why Paul wrote this letter to Timothy, that people ought to conduct themselves in a certain way. 1 John 2.6, whoever claims to live in Him ought to walk as Jesus did.

And that familiar passage, 1 John 3.16, this is how we know what love is. Jesus Christ laid down His life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.

And our duty, our oughtness of laying down our lives for our brothers is founded upon God's first love for us in Christ.

[25:01] Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 1 John 4.11. So, many, many verses where the word ought is used.

And if we do not do what we ought to do, what does the Bible call it? Right. James 4.17, anyone then who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.

It's not just a sin when we do what we shouldn't do. James is saying when we have an ought, a duty, a command, and we don't do it, we're sinning.

So, all failures of doing our duty are sins. Now, this is the language of the New Testament. This is not something that should be new to us and thankfully, in your comments, I'm seeing that it isn't.

But are you aware of the dislike, even in the Christian community, of talking about our duty to God?

[26:02] Are you aware that people don't like, they like to tell us what Jesus has done for me, but don't tell me what I am to do for Him? Well, we need to hear both and that's what you get when you read the Bible.

Ephesians 1-3, you read what God has done for you in Christ and in the Spirit. And then in 4-6, you read what you ought to do to Him, your duty to Him, and so on.

Well, there's a sense in which every imperative in the Bible, every command in the Bible is spelling out what? Our duty. Our responsibility.

What we owe God. So, think of it in that sense. Every command in the Bible, then, is telling me what I owe to my Creator and Lord, my Redeemer.

So, we read in Psalm 119, I have hidden your word in my heart. Why? Why? That I might not sin against you. In other words, one reason for memorizing God's Word and hiding it in our hearts is so that we might live with a sense of our duty.

[27:18] We might not sin against Him. And why not sin against Him? Because we know what He expects of us. We know what our duties are to Him. So that any time, day or night, whether close to a Bible or not, when I'm tempted, I might have a sense of what is my duty to God here and now.

What does He require of me in this situation, on the job, in this relationship, at home? What is my duty? I have hidden Your Word in my heart that I might never know it and obey it.

And Jesus showed the same thing when Satan tempted Him in the wilderness. Every time that Jesus is tempted, we see He's keenly aware of His duty to God.

Satan, you've told me to do this, but it is written, you shall not, or you shall do this. He's living with this sense of what He owes to God.

What His obligation is. And for Jesus, knowing His duty was the end of the matter. Discussion over, case closed. A healthy sense of our duty is a good thing.

[28:25] Pray for it. Read for it. Memorize for it. Ask the Lord to increase it. Now, having said that, it's not enough to know what is wrong, but it surely starts here, keeping our duty before us.

Now, there is an obedience to God, a service to God that is lacking. And this is perhaps where some of the talk in evangelical circles has come from when it's denigrating duty as a motive in the Christian life.

And we must think clearly about it. Sometimes, there is such a service to God that is lacking. And sometimes, it is erroneously being described in Christian circles as when we do something out of a sense of duty.

Brothers and sisters, duty is not the problem. That is not wrong. If we are sane, if we have our wits about us, if we have any spirituality at all in our bones, we ought to feel our duty to God.

We've seen that. What is wrong with our obedience is not a sense of duty, but a lack of other things along with it. That we only have a sense of duty is our problem.

[29:47] So, we read in Scripture that each man should give. And giving of our finances to the Lord is a duty, isn't it? We can't avoid that old New Testament alike.

But 2 Corinthians 9, 7 says, Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

And sometimes, men have treated things like that as saying, See, you're not supposed to do it out of a sense of duty. That's not what Paul is saying. He's saying there should be more than a sense of duty.

You shouldn't only give because you have to, like your whining little children would say, Oh, do I have to? God doesn't want us giving like that. He wants cheerful givers.

But it's not taking a swipe at having a proper sense of duty. We're not to give simply because we're forced to. We're not to give out of necessity, grudgingly, unwillingly.

[30:50] Well, I don't want to, but I guess I have to. I've got my arm behind my back. I'm not happy at all about it. That's what he's taking a swipe at. And so, we need to be careful that we don't think it's saying more than that.

But it is pointing out that if all we have in the Christian life is a sense of our duty to God because He's God and we're men, we're lacking.

We are lacking. And so, elders are to be shepherds of God's flock. Serving as overseers, not because you must, if that's the only reason you're serving, you're coming short.

But because you're willing, not unwilling service, but willing service as God wants you to be. Not greedy for money, but eager to serve. Not because you're forced to it, but voluntarily.

So, if the problem is not that we have a sense of duty, but that that's all we have, help me, what are some of the other motivations to fulfill my duty?

[31:59] Besides just the one that I owe my Maker obedience and service because He's God and I'm man. What are some further motives that surely in the Christian life ought to attend this motive of this is my duty?

I'm sorry, I heard something here. Love. Okay, and how does that motivate? Love for what? And how does that...

Okay. Alright. So, I think that's what we saw on this woman last week, this immoral woman who she was forgiven much so she loved much.

And she was motivated to pour out her service to Christ because of that love that she had received and her great love for the Savior. We love Him because He first loved us.

And it's that love for us that brings us to say, Lord, I want to love You back. And He says, I'll tell you how, John. Keep my commandments. Fulfill your duties. That's one way you can tell me.

[33:04] You love me. So, it's a motivating factor alongside of our duty. That love itself is commanded.

That's a good point. It's the greatest duty we have, isn't it? That's good. What's another motive? Good. Out of the fullness of our hearts, of joy, that we gladly serve our Master.

Ed? Hmm. So, what is the motivation in that passage? Grace. I beseech you, therefore, by the mercies of God, present your bodies as living sacrifices to God.

to not do your own thing, not to be conformed to the world, but to do God's will. To be eager to do what is good. Grace. Mercy. So, it's gratitude here is what we're talking about.

Out of gratitude for mercy and grace and love, that motivation should come right alongside of our sense of duty and strengthen our duty. What other motivations?

[34:10] Dan? So, what are you saying, Dan? What is the motivation in that text? The motivation is to please Him, but why?

What is the urging force behind that imperative? Did you hear what Dan said? I'm glad he said it and I didn't say it, so you can blame Dan. He's saying that the Day of Judgment is another motivation for doing our duty.

Well, Dan's in good grounds because Jesus was constantly using that very motivation. Some things are hard like stopping sins that are as dear to you as your right hand or as your right eye and Jesus says gouge it out if it's causing you to sin.

Whatever it is. Cut off that hand. Whatever it is. Because it's better to enter into heaven maimed than it is to go to hell with two eyes, two feet, and two hands.

The Son of God, when talking to His own disciples, is taking the motivation of God's wrath, of hell, of the judgment day as a motive to duty.

[35:25] And there may be times you need precisely that duty to keep you when none of the other duties or none of the other motives may be operative and up and working as they ought.

So we don't shun it and say, oh, that seems to be beneath me as a Christian. Well, then why did Jesus keep repeating it to us? Do you want to be forgiven? Well, if you don't forgive your brother, your Father in Heaven won't forgive you.

That's a motivation to forgive. It's meant to urge us to our duty to forgive and so on. Loads of scriptures could be cited. Our time is gone.

There's the motivation of rewards as well. Not just the fear of punishment, but of rewards. And again, our Lord is very gracious. Those rewards are not earned.

They're gracious. But they're given to motivate us to do our duty. Many children are told, honor your father and your mother, for this is the first commandment with promise, with promised reward, that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth and so on.

[36:37] So God is urging us to our duties by holding out gracious rewards. So what I want us to see this morning is that a sense of duty is not antagonistic to the other motivations of the Christian life of love and gratitude and fear of God, fear of wrath, desire for reward, joy.

All these things are not fighting each other. They're not competing with each other. They're rather complementary. And we as Christians ought to use all the tools that Jesus puts in the toolbox.

We ought to use all the weapons that He has armed us with to motivate us to our duty. Obedience ought to be something more than our duty, but it's never anything less, as Spurgeon says.

Duty is mine. Consequences are God's. So may the Lord help us. There's one passage and I'll close with this that should forever nail this idea to the grave that duty means joyless obligation.

1 Corinthians 7.3 The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife and likewise the wife to her husband.

[37:59] We have an obligation, a duty to each other. You read the passage, it is intimate, physical relations. It's your duty, you owe it to each other.

Your body doesn't belong to you, but to your spouse. Does knowing your duty make it drudgery and joyless? If it does, something's wrong.

But that's the illustration that I want to leave you with to show that whatever our duty is doesn't mean that a sense of it will kill a sense of joy, love, gratitude.

Those are meant to work in tandem, moving us right along from running from the evil desires and chasing after what's righteous in God's eyes.

Well, our time's gone. Thank you.