

Difficult Statement(s)- “Shaking Off Dust”

In response to Jesus’ words of John 6:53-58 (primarily regarding “*He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life*”), His disciples admitted that such was a “*difficult statement*” in v.60. Have you ever felt that way about something recorded in Scripture? You know it is *inspired* (2Tim.3:16) and *true* (John 17:17), but it’s just.... **hard**. Perhaps not hard to comprehend necessarily, but hard to accept as true and therefore required. Likely, there a few or more passages about which we feel much like Jesus’ disciples did on that day. It’s not that we *can’t* or *won’t* accept what it says as true and therefore necessary, it’s just that we understand how *difficult* putting it into practice is going to be.

While there are many passages that may fit into such a category for you and me- and they’re likely different from person to person due to our individuality, there are some that are difficult for even the most faithful and mature Christian, like...

Matt.10:14. Let me explain, since this verse is probably not one of which you were thinking. Jesus has just “commissioned” His twelve apostles, Matt.10:2-13. There were both *restrictions* (vv.5,9-10) and *instructions* (vv.6-13). Admittedly, this “commissioning” was specifically for His “*apostles*” and do not universally transfer to all Christians today. But we are *charged*, in somewhat comparable ways, to “*teach others also*” (2Tim.2:2), to “*bear much fruit*” (John 15:8), “*to make a defense to every one who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you*” (1Pet.3:15), and to “*proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness and into His marvelous light*” (1Pet.2:9). While we may not be obliged to “*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation*” (Mark 16:15) as they were commanded, we do have a responsibility to teach *who we can where we are*. But this isn’t really the “hard” or “difficult” part...

This “*shaking off the dust of your feet*” is more than just an acknowledgment of someone’s rejection of the truth you’ve presented them; **it is a turning away from them to look for more receptive souls**. “So?” some might ask, “What’s so hard about that?” What if they’re someone close to you? What if they’re a close friend, a loved one, family member, or even a spouse? You *want* them to accept the truth and be saved, but they aren’t interested in *hearing* let alone *doing* what is right. Now what?

Please realize that Jesus’ apostles surely faced this same scenario. They went to their own hometowns and talked about salvation in/through Jesus... and likely faced some of the same rejection by their friends, loved ones, and family members that you’ve experienced. It is hard to “*shake the dust off your feet*” and move on in such circumstances. Because of this difficulty, we often fail to do as the principle requires. We instead continue to beg, plead, cajole, and attempt to “guilt” them into doing something they really don’t want to do. Question: If they “obey the gospel” just to please us, has anything really been accomplished?

The sad reality is that some- regardless of how much we love them and want them to be saved, aren’t interested in *spiritual things*. “*But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised,*” 1Cor.2:14.

Jesus did not *beg* anyone to *hear* and *obey* Him. He said, “*He that has ears, let him hear,*” Matt.13:9. His message of truth and salvation was **for** everyone who was willing to *listen* and *obey*. Not everyone did, or will.

So what are we to do when a loved one refuses to *hear* and *obey* the truth? I offer a few brief suggestions:

- *Shake the dust off your feet and move on.* Acknowledge (even verbally to them) their rejection, and *move on* to others who may be more receptive.
- *Pray* that their hearts may become more receptive at some point in the future, but be aware that such may only occur through difficult or even tragic circumstances in their lives.
- *Revisit* the matter occasionally to “test the waters” to see if there has been a *softening* of the heart, but don’t do so constantly, as such can further its hardening. “Badgering” usually does more harm than good.
- *Don’t allow* their *rejection of truth* to prevent you from providing *opportunities* for **others** to *accept it*. In other words, “Don’t put all your *evangelistic* ‘eggs’ in one basket.” Others, even those not close to or family members with you, need the “*gospel of salvation*” too!
- *Don’t play games- begging and bribery* are not worthy of *the gospel* as “*the power of God for salvation*” (Rom.1:16). Unless they decide that it is *true* and *worthy of real obedience*, your efforts to “get them in the water” (of baptism) may get them wet, but will accomplish little else. Ditto for “repentance” (for the erring).

It’s hard, I know, but not everyone will *hear, obey, and be saved* (Matt.7:13-14)... and some of them who won’t may be loved ones. But you cannot *hear, or obey, or be saved for* them; they must do these things for themselves, cf. Rom.14:12; 2Cor.5:10-11. The best that you can do is to *prayerfully* and *lovingly* provide them with opportunities to *know and do* what is right. (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at southportcofc.org)