

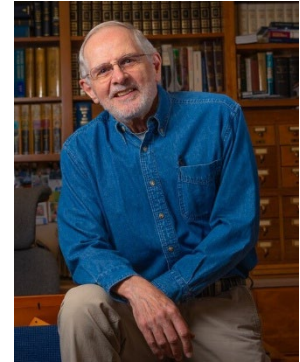
The Christian Life Report

The Cost of Discipleship

Luke 14:25-35

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Pollster George Gallup contends that fewer than ten percent of evangelical Christians could be called deeply committed. Most of those who profess Christianity don't know basic teachings and don't act differently because of their Christian experience. George Barna found that almost half (46%) of evangelicals read their Bible only once a week or not at all.



Our text last week presented God's free invitation of the gospel. He has provided everything at His expense and He invites sinners to come to His great dinner. You cannot bring anything nor do anything to deserve an invitation. God provides it all by His free grace. Our text this week makes what seems like an abrupt shift and shows us the cost of following Christ. It teaches us that:

To truly follow Jesus Christ, we must consider the cost and put Him above everything else.

Salvation is both absolutely free and yet it costs you your very life. You receive it freely at no expense to you, but once you receive it, you have just committed everything you are and have to Jesus Christ. You may protest, "That's a contradiction! How can something be both free and costly at the same time?"

Let me illustrate. Suppose I had a desire to climb Mount Everest. (I don't have such a desire and I think that those who do are lacking in common sense.) But suppose that I did desire to climb Everest. But it costs about \$70,000 to do it and I don't have that kind of money. Suppose a wealthy businessman heard of my desire and offered to pay for the entire expedition. He would buy all the expensive clothing and gear, he would pay for my transportation, the guides, and the training. It's totally free for me. But if I accept his free offer, I have just committed myself to months of difficult training and arduous effort. It could even cost me my very life, because many good climbers die trying to climb Mount Everest. It is free and yet very costly.

Or, consider a friend who offers me a free ride in his airplane. He invites me to come along at his expense. In accepting his free offer, I've just committed my very life to him.

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If he flies safely, I am safe. If he crashes, I die. The instant I say yes to his free offer, I am totally committed to him. I have entrusted my very life into his hands.

Jesus Christ freely offers the water of life to everyone who thirsts. But, we need to understand that when we receive His free offer, we are no longer our own; we have been bought with a price. Thus, to truly follow Christ, we must consider the cost and not begin to follow Him superficially, only to turn back later when things get tough. That is what Jesus warns against in our text.



1. It is Possible to Follow Christ Superficially

Verse 25 is crucial for interpreting what follows. “Great multitudes were going along with Him.” Every pastor would love to have that kind of congregation. Every ministry desires more followers. Pastors with large congregations get their books published and are invited to speak all over the world because they are successful. We measure success by numbers.

But Jesus was different. Large crowds did not fool Him. He knew that many were following Him for selfish or superficial reasons. It was the exciting thing to do. Maybe you or someone you knew would be healed. But Jesus was not a false recruiter. He wanted to weed out those who followed Him for superficial reasons, because when the battle heated up, He knew that they would fall away and cause damage for His cause. So He turned to the great multitude and laid out these demands of discipleship.

At the outset I need to point out that there are many in evangelical circles who draw a sharp distinction between salvation and discipleship. Salvation, they say, is God’s free gift, but discipleship is costly. They would also say that while every believer *ought* to pursue discipleship, it is not linked to saving faith. In other words, there are some who are truly saved, but who never commit themselves to being disciples. They say that it is possible to receive Jesus as Savior, but not to follow Him as Lord.

I cannot find any basis for such teaching in the New Testament, and I can find many Scriptures to refute such teaching. To believe in Jesus Christ as Savior necessarily entails following Him as Lord. Salvation is not just a decision that a man makes, but it is the mighty power of God in raising a dead soul to eternal life. God, who began that good work in you, will perfect it unto the day of Christ Jesus (Phil. 1:6). The new life God imparts inevitably results in a new way of life in accord with its nature, namely growth in holiness. The seed of the Word will bear fruit unto eternal life.

While believers must grow as disciples and while we never perfectly arrive in this life (Phil. 3:12), if a person claims to be a believer, but he isn’t seeking to grow in obedience

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to Christ, he is fooling himself. He is saying, “Lord, Lord,” but on that fearful day, he will hear the awful words, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness” (Matt. 7:23). In Paul’s words, “They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient, and worthless for any good deed” (Titus 1:16).

Thus it is possible to follow Christ superficially and it is to such followers that Jesus lays out the cost of discipleship. He knows that the battle will be intense and He doesn’t want to recruit anyone under false pretenses. Thus,



2. To Follow Christ Truly, We Must Consider the Cost

Jesus first lays out two of the costs of discipleship (14:26-27); then, He gives two parables (14:28-32) that make the same overall point, namely, that a person must give careful consideration to the cost before he rashly jumps into it. Then He states a third cost of discipleship (14:33). He then (14:34-35) gives an illustration about salt to illustrate the cost of *not* truly following Him. He concludes by warning, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

Before we look at the costs that Jesus spells out, think with me for a moment about the phrases, “sit down and calculate the cost,” referring to the man building the tower (14:28); and, “sit down and take counsel,” referring to the king considering going to war (14:31). Both refer to careful, detailed, rational thinking in which you consider all aspects of what you’re getting into before you make the commitment. Such careful thinking is opposed to an impulsive decision made in a moment of intense emotion, without much thought about the consequences.

Our evangelistic methods today are big on emotion and little on reason. We get people into a stadium to hear testimonies from famous athletes or movie stars about how Christ changed their lives. Then they hear a rousing speaker promise how Christ can meet the person’s every need. Then the invitation is given and counselors are primed to get out of their seats and walk forward so that people on the verge of a decision think that others are going forward. The choir or band is playing a song of invitation. Going forward feels like the right thing to do. In a swell of emotion, the person gets out of his seat and “decides for Christ.”

But did the person get saved? By God’s grace, some do. But even the well-known evangelists admit that the long-term “stick with it” rate for those who make a decision is only about 10-15 percent. All too often, their decision was based more on emotion than on careful thought about what it means to follow Christ. Here, Jesus says to the crowds who were interested enough to be going along with Him, “Consider the cost of following Me.”

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A. We Must Consider the Cost of Following Christ

Jesus spells out three costs:

(1). We Must Hate Our Families and Ourselves (14:26)

Whoa! Doesn't the Bible say that we are to love our families? Doesn't it say that no man ever hated his own flesh? Is Jesus contradicting the Bible? Of course not! But He puts it in these terms for shock value, to get us to stop and think about the stringent demand that He is making. He means that our allegiance and love for Him must be so great that by comparison our love for our families and even for our own lives looks like hatred.

Normally, there is no conflict between loving Christ and our family members also. But sometimes a tug of war develops, where a family member puts pressure on us to back off from or even abandon our love for Christ. In those difficult situations, we do not love either Christ or the family member if we accede to the pressure. We do not love the family member, because if we bow to the pressure, we are saying that Christ is not worthy of being followed above all others, and we keep the family member from seriously considering the claims of Christ. We do not love Christ because we have put a sinful human being, who did not give himself for our sins, in a higher place than the spotless Lamb of God who freely offered Himself as the sacrifice for our sins.

The late theologian/philosopher, Francis Schaeffer, whose life and books have impacted thousands for Christ, was raised in a non-Christian home. After he became a Christian, his father did not want him to go to college and did not want him to become a minister, which young Fran felt called to be. When the moment finally came where he had to make the decision to go with what he thought God wanted or to submit to his father's wishes, Fran asked in a strained voice, "Pop, give me a few minutes to go down in the cellar and pray." In fear and uncertainty, he went down there and wept hot tears of sorrow for his father.

Then, in an act of desperate and simple faith, he did something that he would never advise anyone else to do, but what he felt was right for him at the time: he prayed, "Oh, God, *please* show me." Then he took out a coin and said, "Heads, I'll go in spite of dad's desires." It was heads. Still weeping, he cried out, "God, be patient with me. If it's tails this time, I'll go." Tails. The third time he pleaded, "Once, more, God. I don't want to make a mistake with Dad upstairs. Please now, let it be heads again." It was heads. So he went upstairs and told his dad that he *had* to go.

His dad looked hard at him, then went out to slam the door. But just before the door hit the frame, his voice came through, "I'll pay for the first half year." It was many years later

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that Fran's dad became a Christian, but Fran thinks that this moment was the basis of his salvation, when Fran in effect declared, "I must follow the Lord." (Told by Edith Schaeffer, in *The Tapestry* [Word], pp. 60-62).

As a Christian young person, you should seek to be obedient to your parents in all things, unless they are asking you to go against what God wants you to do. You should appeal to them in a submissive manner. But if it comes down to a choice to obey your parents and disobey Christ or to obey Christ and disobey your parents, you must follow Christ. As a Christian wife, you may have an unbelieving husband who says, "I don't want you to go to church." While you must seek to be the most loving and pleasant wife you can be, you must also explain to your husband that following Jesus Christ is more important to you than your relationship with anyone on this earth. That is the clear application of verse 26.

When Jesus says that we must hate even our own lives, again He means in comparison with our love for Him. Normally, when we follow Christ He lovingly gives us the desires of our hearts (Ps. 37:4). He floods us with joy and true pleasure (Ps. 16:11). But, there are times when it is easy to give in to the immediate gratification of the flesh and it is hard to obey Christ. The disciple has thought this through in advance and is committed to follow Christ.

(2). *We Must Carry Our Own Cross (14:27)*

We have already considered this in our study of Luke 9:23. The cross was not an implement of irritation or inconvenience. The cross was an implement of slow, tortuous death. Jesus here is looking at the process of daily death to selfish desires and of the willingness to bear reproach for His name's sake. Since our Savior suffered the rejection and agony of the cross, if we follow after Him, we must be prepared for the same treatment. If people revile us for being Christians, we must bless them in return (Rom. 12:14). We should never do anything to provoke persecution, but if we suffer for the sake of righteousness, we must entrust our souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right (1 Pet. 4:19).

Again, this is a process in which we all must grow. If we blow it, we must confess it to the Lord and seek to be obedient the next time we have opportunity to suffer for Him. But if we aren't involved in the process of carrying our own cross in death to self, we are not on the path of the disciple of Jesus Christ.

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(3). *We Must Give Up All Our Possessions (14:33)*

After telling the two parables about considering the cost before making a commitment, Jesus concludes, “So therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions.” Does Jesus mean this literally, that we must get rid of everything we own and take a vow of poverty in order to be a Christian? What does He mean?

I believe that Jesus is getting at the fact that there are two possible lords that we can serve and the two are exclusive: God or Mammon. Most of us think that we can combine them, with God taking the lead: “I’ll serve God mostly, but I’d also like to serve money.” But Jesus says that won’t work: “You *cannot* serve God and Mammon” (Luke 16:13, emphasis mine). In other words, you can’t just add Jesus to your already materialistic lifestyle as a way of rounding out your spiritual needs. To be a Christian means that you have been bought with a price and you are not your own (1 Cor. 6:19-20). Nothing you own is your own. You become the slave of Jesus Christ and He owns everything.

I like the way Juan Carlos Ortiz tells the story of the pearl of great price. A man sees this pearl and says to the merchant, “I want this pearl. How much is it?”:

The seller says, “It’s very expensive.” “How much?” “A lot!” “Well, do you think I could buy it?” the man asks.

“Oh, yes,” says the merchant, “everyone can buy it.”

“But I thought you said it was very expensive.” “I did.” “Well, how much?” “Everything you have,” says the seller.

“All right, I’ll buy it.” “Okay, what do you have?”

“Well, I have \$10,000 in the bank.” “Good, \$10,000. What else?” “That’s all I have.” “Nothing more?” “Well, I have a few dollars more in my pocket.” “How much?” “Let’s see ... \$100.” “That’s mine, too,” says the seller.

“What else do you have?” “That’s all, nothing else.” “Where do you live?” the seller asks. “In my house. Yes, I own a home.” The seller writes down, “house.” “It’s mine.”

“Where do you expect me to sleep—in my camper?” “Oh, you have a camper, do you? That, too. What else?” “Am I supposed to sleep in my car?” “Oh, you have a car?” “Yes, I own two of them.” “They’re mine now.”

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“Look, you’ve taken my money, my house, my camper, and my cars. Where is my family going to live?” “So, you have a family?” “Yes, I have a wife and three kids.” “They’re mine now.”

Suddenly the seller exclaims, “Oh, I almost forgot! *You* yourself, too! Everything becomes mine—wife, children, house, money, cars, and you, too.” Then he goes on, “Now, listen, I will allow you to use all these things for the time being. But don’t forget that they’re all mine, just as you are. And whenever I need any of them, you must give them up, because I am now the owner.” (Adapted from *The Disciple* [Creation House], pp. 34-35.)

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That’s what Jesus means when He says that we must give up all our possessions in order to be His disciple. He isn’t just Lord of a tenth; He is Lord of all. We are just managers of it for Him. Of course, in return we gain all the riches of heaven for all eternity. But, still, we need to sit down and determine if we’re willing to follow Jesus as Lord of everything from our families, to our possessions, to our very lives.

B. We Must Consider the Cost of *Not* Following Christ

If we make a profession of following Christ, but then go back on our commitment, people will ridicule us as they would mock a man who started to build a tower but couldn’t complete it: “He claimed that he became a Christian, but look at him now! Some Christian he is!” Or, we will face the damaging effects of being defeated by the enemy because we did not consider the intensity of the battle we were facing. Satan loves it when a Christian’s testimony is ruined because he did not consider the demands of following Christ in this evil world.

Jesus uses a third illustration to show the cost of not following Him, that of salt that has become tasteless. The salt in Jesus’ day was often corrupted with other substances. If moisture hit the salt, it would evaporate and leave behind these other impure minerals, so that the salt lost its saltiness. It was worthless for any useful purpose and had to be thrown away. Jesus is saying that if a follower of His doesn’t live as he ought to live, he is useless to God. Whether Jesus is referring to a false believer being judged or to a true believer being taken out of this life because of his sin is ambiguous. But either way, I don’t want it to happen to me! The point is, follow Jesus Christ by putting Him above everything else in life so that you are useful to God. That’s the last thing we must briefly consider:

3. To Follow Christ Yruly, We Must Put Him Above Everything Else in Life

Jesus clearly asserts His absolute supremacy and authority in these verses! What mere man could rightly claim that everyone must hate their closest family members in

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comparison to their love for him? We would rightly call such a man a cult leader, unless He were God in human flesh! What man could tell his followers to follow him into death? Jim Jones did and he was rightly labeled a lunatic. But Jesus Christ could do it because He is God! What man could tell people to give up all their possessions for His sake? Some modern cults require that of their followers and we rightly label them as false. But Jesus could do so with authority because He is the Lord. He alone deserves to be first above everything else in all of our lives because He is the Lord God who willingly offered Himself on the cross for our sins!

Conclusion

Jesus' words here are tough and sobering! We all fall short, but we must honestly work at applying them to our hearts. Is there any relationship that comes ahead of Christ in your life? If He is first, then obviously you will be spending consistent time alone with Him in His Word, in prayer, and in devotion. You will be fellowshiping with Him every day. You won't allow any other relationship to draw you away from obedience to Him. You will confess and forsake every sin that hinders fellowship with Him.

Is He the Lord of your plans, your thoughts, and of all that you do? Or, could you selfishly be clinging to *your* plans, to *your* way, instead of seeking to please Him in all things, beginning with every thought that you entertain? If you don't hate your own life and daily carry your cross, you're not His disciple.

Is He Lord of your finances and possessions? Are you faithful in managing these things for *His* purposes? Do you give generously and faithfully to His work? Or, could the love of money be choking out the Word in your life?

Salvation is absolutely free, but once you receive it, it costs you everything. To truly follow Christ, we must consider the cost and put Him above everything else. "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How can a person who claims to be a Christian, but who is not fully committed know if he's *really* a Christian? Can a person be saved and yet not acknowledge Christ as his Lord?
2. Is discipleship distinct from salvation? What biblical evidence supports and opposes this view?

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3. Some argue that a Christian young person should submit to his parents totally, even if they do not want him to pursue a call to the ministry. Is this biblically defensible?
4. How can we know how much of our income the Lord allows us to spend on ourselves and how much to give to His work?



Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture Quotations are from the New American Standard Bible, Updated Edition © The Lockman Foundation

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