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The Cost to Discipleship

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Introduction:

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.

1. What's the cost of following Christ?

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

2. It is possible to follow Christ superficially.

(Luke 14:25) The Cost of Being a Disciple

²⁵ Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said:

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 an exciting thing to do. 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.*

3. What’s the difference between Salvation and Discipleship?

There’s 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.

To believe in Jesus Christ as Savior means 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. *(Phil 1:6)*

A person claims to be a believer, but he isn’t seeking to grow in obedience to Christ, they are fooling themselves. 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)*.

4. To follow Christ truly, we must consider the cost.

Jesus first lays out *two of the costs* of discipleship *(Luke 14:26-27)*; then, He gives *two parables (14:28-32)* that make the same overall point, that a person must give careful consideration to the cost before he rashly jumps into it. Then He states a *third cost of discipleship (Luke 14:33)*. He then *(Luke 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 *(Luke 14:28)*.

14:28 calculate the cost: Jesus encourages His followers—as well as those in the crowd of pilgrims who had not yet become His disciples—to consider the great sacrifices involved in their decision.

This refers 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 church to hear sermons and testimonies about how Christ changed their lives. Then they hear us 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 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.**"

5. We must consider the cost of following Christ.

Jesus spells out three costs:

(1). We must hate our families and ourselves (Luke 14:26).

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 demand that we are 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.

(2). We must carry our own cross (Luke 14:27).

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).

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.

(3). We must give up all our possessions (Luke 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?

Jesus is getting at the fact that there are two 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). 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.

6. 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 house but couldn't complete it: "They claimed to be a Christian but look at them now! Some Christian they are!" 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. 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:

7. To follow Christ truly, we must put Him above everything else in life.

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

