

The Cost of Discipleship

† “Deny Himself.”

† “Take up His Cross”

† “Follow Me”

himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.”

(Matthew 16:24)

These three requirements sum up everything expected of a

Christian. Let us carefully examine each demand.

Deny Himself

The disciple of Jesus must “deny himself.” He must forsake “all that he has” (Luke 14:33), i.e., he must put Christ ahead of all else in his life (Galatians 2:20).

The one who puts Jesus first will hate his own family (Luke 14:26). Does this mean I must despise and turn against my loved ones? If this is what the Master demands, then, I must confess, I am unable to pay the price. Not even Jesus hated His own mother; rather, He demonstrated the greatest love of a son for a mother (John 19:25-27). The word “hate” in the Scriptures commonly means simply “to love less.” (cf. Matthew 6:24) The Lord demands that we love our own families less than we love Him (Matthew 10:34-37). Even though my family might turn against me because of my faith, I must follow on to truly be the Lord’s disciple.

To be Jesus’ disciple, I must put the Lord ahead of riches. In Mark 10:17-27, Jesus told of a young man who lacked just one thing to be pleasing to God - he put his riches ahead of Christ (verses 21-22). The Master observed the extreme difficulty for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God (verses 23-27). I must faithfully follow Christ, even if it is damaging to my job and wealth.

To be a faithful disciple of Christ, I am directed to put Him ahead of worldly pleasures (2 Timothy 3:4). I must be willing to give my life for Him if necessary, rather than reject my faith (Matthew 16:25-27). I must willingly forsake all the sins that stain my soul (Romans 6:6; Galatians 5:24). I must truly put the Lord ahead of all else.

Take Up His Cross

The disciple of Christ must “take up his cross.” (Matthew 16:24) This does not mean to endure aches, pains, and hardships unrelated to being a Christian. Rather, this refers to willingness to cheerfully suffer

the daily persecutions and hardships that come from following Jesus and to remain faithful (cf. Luke 9:23). As the poet beautifully wrote:

Must Jesus bear the cross alone,

And all the world go free ?

No, there's a cross for ev'ry one,

And there's a cross for me. (Thomas Shepherd) The Jews insulted

Jesus by calling Him “Beelzebub,” literally, “lord of dung or of filth,” a blasphemous insult (Matthew 10:24-25). Why should we be amazed if we are called “Campbellites” or “Antis”? All who faithfully follow the Master will be persecuted (2 Timothy 3:12).

To bear the cross, we must never be ashamed of nor hide the fact that we are Christians (Mark 8:38). Christians are known, not by bumper stickers, special clothing, or self-righteous attitude, but by their lives.

Follow Me

To be a disciple of Christ, I must follow Him (Matthew 16:24). This means I will continue in His word (John 8:31-32), letting it be my guide each day. It means my life will be like Jesus’ (Luke 6:40), as I walk daily in His footsteps. It means I will seek to save those who are lost, even as my Master did (Luke 19:10), thus bearing much fruit for God (John 15:8).

Is It Worth It?

The cost of discipleship is indeed high! Does the return justify the investment? The apostles left everything to follow Jesus (Mark 10:28). Jesus promised them that, for every sacrifice they made, they would be rewarded “a hundredfold now in this time, ... with persecutions--and in the age to come, eternal life.” (Mark 10:29-30) The fellowship with those of like precious faith, the sharing we have with one another of both spiritual and physical blessings, the promise of life everlasting - what a wonderful reward! Will you not determine to pay the cost of discipleship?

Questions for Review

I. True/False

1. _____ Any important and difficult venture deserves proper planning.

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2. ____ It is better to begin to follow Christ and turn back than never to follow Him at all.
3. ____ “Let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me” sum up everything expected of a Christian.
4. ____ It is alright to put your family ahead of Christ.
5. ____ I must faithfully follow Christ, even if it is damaging to my job and wealth.
6. ____ I must put Christ ahead of worldly pleasures
7. ____ God expects Christians to keep on sinning.
8. ____ Christians must be willing to suffer for Christ.
9. ____ Just because you faithfully follow Jesus doesn’t mean you will be persecuted.
10. ____ If you follow Christ, people may call you insulting names.
11. ____ Bearing our cross means to endure the aches, pains, and hardships of life that everyone encounters.
12. ____ I must let Christ guide my daily life.
13. ____ I do not need to try to bring lost people to Christ.
14. ____ The cost of discipleship is indeed high.
15. ____ The reward for following Christ is more than worth the cost.

II. Matching

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| 1. ____ Hate | A. put Christ ahead of all else in life |
| 2. ____ Beelzebub | B. love less |
| 3. ____ deny himself | C. cheerfully suffer for following Jesus |
| 4. ____ take up his cross | D. continue in His Word and live as He did |
| 5. ____ follow me | E. lord of dung or of filth |

In pioneer America, preachers of various denominations often pushed into the wilderness to hold “camp meetings” for the new settlements. Many times a little church would spring up only to gradually die out after the evangelist had left. Thus, the next preacher coming that way would have to “revive” the little congregation. In this way the meetings came to be called “revivals.”

These people who eagerly formed a church and then carelessly abandoned it shared a common attitude with many of the Lord’s first century disciples. The members of the congregation failed to consider the demands of faithful membership in that denomination and drifted away. Many of Jesus’ disciples failed to count the cost of discipleship and thus “went back and walked with Him no more.” (John 6:66) What does it cost to be a disciple of Christ?

Why Count the Cost?

You may ask, Why should I count the cost of discipleship? Allow me to offer two good reasons. The Lord teaches us to so consider. In Luke 14:25-35, Jesus taught “great multitudes” who followed Him what it took to truly follow Him. Christ reminded them that, when a man builds a tower, he must first plan ahead, adding up the cost, lest he, having started, would be unable to finish and would become a laughing stock (verses 28-30). Further, the Master spoke of a king who, when he was confronted by a superior enemy, would carefully plan to save his life and his kingdom (verses 31-32). The point of these illustrations is that any important and difficult venture deserves proper planning. Could any undertaking be more important or more difficult than starting a life of walking in the steps of Jesus (cf. Luke 14:33)?

Furthermore, we need to count the cost of discipleship because those who begin the journey and then turn back are in worse spiritual condition than those who have never followed the Master (Luke 14:34-35).

What Does the Lord Demand?

What does the Lord demand of His disciples? “Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny