

The Cost of Discipleship
Dr. Michael A. Cox
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Text: Mark 8:34-38 (see also Matt. 16:24-27; Luke 9:22-26)
Gospel of Mark: [Bibliography](#) or [Manuscripts and Greek Exegesis](#)
UBS 4th Edition Paragraph Topic: Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection

Central Idea of Message: Following Jesus has both significant requirements and rewards.

Introduction: Episode 42. Self-denial is rejection of anything that might conflict with God's will for our life. This is the focus of the present passage.

In our "Just Do It" age of entitlement and promotion of personal "rights" to the point of absurdity [finding the "right" to abortion and same-sex marriage in the Constitution], almost any concept or suggestion of self-denial is routinely condemned.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a Lutheran pastor who lived in Germany during the time of Adolf Hitler's crazed-Nazi dictatorship. He was arrested, imprisoned, and eventually executed just before the end of World War II. He understood discipleship and its cost. Here is an excerpt from his book *The Cost of Discipleship*:

Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate. Costly grace is the gospel which must be *sought* again and again, the gift which must be *asked* for, the door at which a man must *knock*. Such grace is *costly* because it calls us to follow, and it is *grace* because it calls us to follow *Jesus Christ*. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above

all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son.

Make no mistake about this fact - following Jesus is costly and Jesus pulled no punches in expressing the price of discipleship! This message is an analysis and exposition of what he said and its implications.

I. **The Requirements for Following Jesus (v. 34)**

- A. Jesus summoned the entire multitude, not just his twelve disciples, and issued a declaration
- B. "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me"
 - 1. The sentence begins with a conditional conjunction: if [εἰ]
 - a) Technically a first class condition
 - b) Establishing a reality, so it can be done
 - 2. Jesus' invitation is open to everyone
 - 3. The propellant is an internal wish to follow him
 - a) In Oklahoma we call this "a hankerin'"
 - b) It's a desire, it's an "I want to do that"
 - 4. To "come after" is to follow Jesus
 - a) Make him our Teacher
 - b) Make him our Mentor
 - c) Make him our example
 - d) Make him our paradigm
 - e) Make him our Master
 - f) Make him our Lord
- C. How?
 - 1. **Deny, disown, renounce, and disregard yourself**
 - a) There can be no authentic following of Jesus while simultaneously following oneself!
 - b) This means to turn away from the natural instinct of self-centeredness
 - c) **Self-denial [relinquishing one's ego] has always been an indisputable, irreplaceable, indispensable component of Christianity**
 - 2. **Take up his cross**
 - a) A cross was a torture stake with only one purpose - dying on
 - b) The Romans reserved this form of capital punishment mostly for those accused of

revolting against the authority of the Roman government (cf. Brown 89)

- c) Crosses are not carried around in life!
 - (1) Crosses are not scars, wounds, hurts, physical challenges, financial hardships, or damaged relationships
 - (2) The "cross" analogy fits only one circumstance - death
 - (3) Especially martyrdom
- d) Bear in mind that Jesus was telling his audience in advance just exactly what he was going to do - carry his own death stake to the appointed place, lie down on it, extend his hands and feet to be nailed to it, and thus be executed on it
- e) Looks like a prophecy to me!
- f) **I love Jesus for many reasons, but one of them is that Jesus never used the tactic known as "bait and switch"**
 - (1) Bait with the sweetness of honey and the glory of heaven
 - (2) Switch to the bitterness of vinegar and the infamy of rejection and execution
 - (3) **The true gospel of Jesus Christ never extends the notion of grace without the requirement of repentance and taking up his cross - the easy minus the hard - the free minus the costly - never!**
 - (4) Many today seem to extend God's grace without the necessity of repentance and the expectation of suffering, scorn, shame, and even martyrdom
 - (a) This is not Christianity!
 - (b) This is a "cheap grace" which is nothing short of counterfeit
 - (c) This results in churches filled with, and even led by, people who never repented of their sin and never took up his cross
- g) Jesus said if we want to follow him, we must take up our cross and die to ourselves in order to live for him

3. **Follow him**

- a) Let him lead
- b) Look in the Bible to learn his character, to discern what is truth, and identify what is righteous
- c) Stay right on his heels!
- d) **We choose the way of the cross because it is, unquestionably, the will of God!**

II. **The Rewards for Following Jesus (vv. 35-38)**

- A. How do we save our life (v. 35)?
 - 1. Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it
 - 2. Life is also soul and means the will, the reason, and especially the emotions
 - 3. Whoever loses his life for Jesus' sake and the gospel's sake shall save it
 - 4. **We save our life by giving it up in humility, repentance, and self-denial for the sake of Jesus and his gospel [truth]**
 - a) Such a foreign idea to all minds!
 - b) In a world that has been a "look out for number one" world since Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, this statement by Jesus must have exploded some heads!
 - (1) Look out for me, myself, and I!
 - (2) Look out for my interests!
 - (3) Look out for my self-promotion!
- B. What does it profit anyone to gain the whole world and forfeit her or his soul (v. 36)?
 - 1. **The answer is - it doesn't!**
 - 2. **No amount of fame, no amount of glory, no amount of money, no amount of property, no amount of sex, no amount of any earthly thing is worth forfeiting our soul for eternity!**
 - 3. What good is amassing earthly things only to die and not be able to enjoy them for eternity after having exchanged one's soul for them?
- C. What shall we give in exchange for our soul (v. 37)?
 - 1. Illustrations (Barclay 238-9)
 - a) "Honor for profit"?
 - b) "Principle for popularity"?
 - c) "The lasting things for the cheap things"?

- d) "Eternity for the moment"?
- 2. **A quick glimpse at popular culture says that many of us work for cheap!**
- 3. **We sell out the eternal for the temporary!**
- 4. **We exchange what is priceless for what has no lasting value or use!**
- 5. **We desperately seek more the approval of the world than the approval of God!**
- D. Do not be ashamed of Jesus and his words (v. 38)
 - 1. Whoever is ashamed of Jesus and his words in this adulterous and sinful generation will receive the same response from him when he comes - ashamed
 - a) Adulterous means wedded to God but wholly unfaithful
 - b) A generation bent on sinful pursuits at the expense of their own souls
 - 2. In context, Jesus was, again, predicting that he would be executed on a cross as one revolting against Rome's authority
 - 3. But then Jesus also promised to return in the glory of his Father with the holy angels
 - a) Certainly a reference to his resurrection!
 - b) Clearly not a reference to any secret rapture
 - c) Jesus is coming back in glory and power to establish his earthly kingdom which will last 1,000 years!
 - d) Please note that Jesus, unlike the liberal Sadducees, believed in the existence of angels and the resurrection of the dead!

Conclusion: Principles.

(1) **Self-denial is the philosophy of life for all disciples of Jesus [he summoned the whole crowd to hear this declaration], not just for the apostles or ministers (v. 34).**

(2) **By using the image of the cross, Jesus signaled, unmistakably, that following him would be no bed of roses and would, in fact, be a brutal path of hostility to travel and would result in being regarded as a criminal [villain, not victim] (v. 34).**

(3) **Following Christ may bring martyrdom and will most certainly bring scorn and ridicule from those wishing to pound**

Christ's followers into societal [cultural, social] submission (v. 34).

(4) Grace without repentance, self-denial, and taking up our cross is nothing more than "cheap grace," which amounts to nothing short of a counterfeit gospel (v. 34).

(5) A cross is staring every would-be disciple of Jesus squarely in the face and is emphatically prototypical [the prototype] for every Christian (v. 34; cf. Lane 306).

(6) Suffering was not only the destiny of Jesus but also the destiny of eleven of his twelve original disciples and the destiny of those who choose to follow him even now (v. 34).

(7) "The world thinks that 'nothing succeeds like success,' and that the chief end of human activity is one's own happiness. Experience confirms Christ in teaching that nothing fails like success, for it is generally disappointing and often depraving to character, and that to seek one's own happiness in all things is a sure way of missing it" (v. 35; Plummer 208).

(8) If we live for ourselves, we will lose ourselves, but if we live for Christ, we will both find and gain ourselves (v. 35).

(9) "No amount of success can compensate for loss of internal peace or deterioration of character" (v. 36; Plummer 208).

(10) Nothing in the world, no pleasure of life, can adequately compensate for the eternal loss of our soul (v. 37).

(11) An "adulterous" generation is an era when people are spiritually and morally unfaithful to God and his written word, and this condition is classified as "sinful." Does this describe our generation (v. 38)?

(12) When Jesus returns in glory, he will disown those who showed that they never really belonged to him by having already disowned him [i.e. Judas] (v. 38; see also Matt. 10:33).