

NOTES:

Lesson 9

Death to Our Soul

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THE CENTER OF SIN IS “I”

When Satan presented Eve with the opportunity to become like God, Satan enticed Eve to eat the forbidden fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In her innocence, Eve could not fully comprehend the nature of evil. Nonetheless, because God had the knowledge of evil, Eve desired to have this knowledge as well:

*And the serpent said to the woman, “**You surely shall not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.**” (Ge.3:4-5 NASB)*

When Satan contradicted God’s warning (“You will surely die”), he implied that God commanded Adam and Eve to not eat the forbidden fruit because it would allow them to gain equality with God. Satan insinuated that God gave the command to keep Adam and Eve in submission to Him. When Eve ate the forbidden fruit, she rebelled against God:

*But I am afraid that **as the serpent deceived Eve by its cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.** (2Co.11:3 NRSV)*

Satan convinced Eve to leave her devotion to God and to steal God’s knowledge. Eve desired the right to choose. In other words, Eve desired to be the sovereign over her life, lord of herself. However, God created man’s spirit to influence his body to submit to God. When Adam sinned, he rejected his spirit’s influence and chose to be the master of himself. Adam’s spirit died because he rebelled against God. Consequently, because of Adam and Eve, man’s spirit is dead; therefore, man lives by his soul:

***For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.** (1Co.15:22 NKJV)*

Man’s soul lives according to its personality and preferences, which are continually altered by his experiences. Because of Adam and Eve,

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT:

1. Why must a person hate his life before he can become a Christian?
2. What does the Greek verb tense of “I have been crucified” from Galatians 2:20 teach us?
3. What does the phrase “deny himself” from Luke 9:23 mean to a Christian?
4. What does the statement “cannot be my disciple” imply?
5. What does the phrase “carry your own cross” from Luke 14:27 mean to a Christian?
6. What does the phrase “follow Christ” from Luke 14:27 mean to a Christian?
7. What does the phrase “give up everything” from Luke 14:33 mean to a Christian?
8. What is the difference between your soul in control of your life and Christ being the Lord of your life?

and promising him your servitude for the rest of your life. When a person makes Jesus the Lord of his life, he gives Jesus absolute authority over his life. Servitude to Christ is the cost of discipleship:

*Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and **for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has** and buys that field.* (Mt 13:44 NKJV)

If a person does not give up everything—self-rule, dreams, preferences, and possessions—to be Christ’s disciple, then he is not a Christian from Christ’s perspective. Surrender to God is so important that Christ used a second parable to demonstrate its significance:

*"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, **he went and sold all that he had, and bought it.**"* (Mt.13:45-46 NASB)

All over the world, people have agreed to Christ’s cost of discipleship. Many Christians are forced to flee their homes with only the clothes on their backs, because they will not compromise their belief in Christ. Some Christians endure harsh imprisonment where they are tortured, abused, and forced to work. To be free, these Christians only have to renounce Christ. When Christ paid for our sins, He experienced the pain that Christians have suffered since the formation of the church. Now Jesus asks us to bear the cost to be His disciples. You might not suffer like Christ did; but you must pledge to Christ that you are willing to suffer for Him if persecution comes. Christ cautions us:

*"Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and **estimate the cost** to see if you have enough money to complete it? For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, saying, 'This person began to build and wasn't able to finish.' "Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. **Won't he first sit down and consider whether he is able** with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, **those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.**"* (Lk.14:28-33 NRSV)

Therefore, when Adam and Eve desired to be like God and ate the forbidden fruit, they rebelled against Him. Now, God gives mankind the chance to return to their rightful place as servants, if they will die to the self-rule of their souls and make Jesus Christ the Lord of their lives.

man’s soul became master and gained control of his body. God’s salvation returns man to his rightful place, in submission to God with man’s spirit in control of his soul. The soul was never created to control man but rather to be controlled by God through man’s spirit. To be reborn spiritually, a person must die to his soul which controls him:

*Truly, truly, I say to you, **unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies**, it remains by itself alone; but **if it dies, it bears much fruit**. He who loves his life loses it; and he **who hates his life** ^[soul] **in this world shall keep it** to life eternal. **If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me**; and where I am, there shall My servant also be; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.* (Jn.12:24-26 NASB)

Before a person can accept a position of servitude to God, he must hate his life that is controlled by his soul. Only when a person hates his life will he be willing to die to self-rule and to yield his life to Christ’s control. Before a person can experience the fullness of God, he must die to “I” and his self-proclaimed right to command his own destiny. In Romans 7:7-25, Paul describes his life under the law, in which he was dominated by “I.” In fact, in this passage, Paul uses the word “I” thirty-two times and the word “me” eleven times. He does not mention the Holy Spirit once, and he even denies that the Holy Spirit dwelt within him (“nothing good dwells in me” ^{Ro.7:18 NASB}). We learn from Paul that a life with “I” on the throne of one’s heart is a life of helplessness:

***What a wretched man I am!** Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!* (Ro.7:24-25 NIV)

Before Christ could rescue Paul, Paul had to accept that he was a wretched man. Therefore, a person must hate what he is before he can willingly surrender his soul’s control to God and submit to Christ.

THE RIGHTS OF SELF

When I was a child, I played “Musical Chairs.” In “Musical Chairs,” the chairs are placed in a circle, and there is one less chair than the number of children. All the children walk in a circle around the chairs while music plays. Every time that the music stops, each child scrambles to sit on a chair. The child without a seat leaves the game and becomes a spectator, and a chair is removed from the circle. The game repeats this process until there remains only one child who is then pronounced the winner of the game. Many Christians live their lives

like children play “Musical Chairs.” But these Christians play the game with only two players, Christ and “I” (their souls). When these Christians make decisions, they decide whether they themselves or Christ will sit on the throne of their hearts. These self-professed Christians obey Christ only when their desires coincide with God’s will. Hence, they proceed through life, maintaining ultimate control of their lives. Self-professed Christians choose moment by moment whether they will serve their sinful desires or Christ’s desires. Because they retain the right to choose sin, Christ is not the Lord of their lives; and they are not saved. Nonetheless, Biblical Christianity is not like “Musical Chairs.” In Luke 14, Christ addresses the common people:

*Now **great multitudes** went with Him. And **He turned and said to them . . .*** (Lk.14:25 NKJV)

These people were those who came for healing, deliverance, or the truth that could bring peace. To these people, Jesus listed four requirements that He expects a person to fulfill before that person can be His disciple.

1. CHRIST’S PRECEDENCE

The first requirement is that a person gives Christ precedence above his family and his life:

*If anyone comes to me and **does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters — yes, even their own life —** he cannot be my disciple.* (Lk.14:26 NIV)

Jesus does not command us to hate our relatives, for that command would contradict what He taught elsewhere:

*Anyone **who hates his brother is a murderer**, and you know that **no murderer has eternal life** in him.* (1Jn.3:15 NIV)

Hence, in Luke 14:26, Christ states that His disciples must not allow any earthly relationship to take precedence over their relationship with Christ. Naturally, we want to live up to the expectations of our loved ones and not disappoint them. Nonetheless, we must disregard our families and please Christ when our families insist that we live contrary to what Christ commands us. Our love for Christ must exceed our love for others and ourselves. If we love something or someone more than we love Christ, we are idolaters—not worthy of Christ:

*He who **loves father or mother more than Me** is not worthy of Me; and he who **loves son or daughter more than Me** is not worthy of*

to save us, and He asks us to give up everything as well. The twelve disciples obeyed Christ:

*Peter began to say to him, “Look, **we have left everything** and followed you.”* (Mk.10:28 NRSV)

When Peter, James, and John worked together in their fishing boats, Jesus came to them:

*When they had brought their boats to shore, **they left everything** and followed him.* (Lk.5:11 NRSV)

When Levi was collecting taxes, Jesus came and commanded him to follow:

*Levi got up, **left everything** and followed him.* (Lk.5:28 NIV)

Consider what Paul says about earthly positions and possessions:

*What is more, **I consider everything a loss** because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, **for whose sake I have lost all things**. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him.* (Php.3:8-9 TNIV)

Like the rich ruler, a person must decide whether he will give God everything, before he can become Jesus’ disciple. Therefore, when we made Christ our Lord, we agreed to give Him Lordship over everything and to allow Him the freedom to work in our lives as He sees fit.

SUMMARY

When I made Christ my Lord, I made my last choice; for after that choice, disobedience was not an option. Similarly, we made our last choice when we made Christ our Lord, for we gave up our right to choose when we gave Christ our lives and everything in them. There are self-professed Christians who love and respect Christ, but they treat Him like an honored guest in their lives. However, Christ is not satisfied with being a guest because then a Christian can ask Christ to leave when he wants to indulge in sin. For example, if a guest comes to your house, you know that he will stay for a limited time. You do not expect the guest to move your furniture or to change the color of your walls. After all, he is only the guest and not the owner; you are the owner of your home. Contrary to a guest, Christ requires that His disciples give Him ownership of their lives so that He can make changes without their permission. This transfer of ownership is like giving a person your house keys, telling him that your house is his to change,

and possessions because we know that God owns them and only lent them to us:

*For who sees anything different in you? **What do you have that you did not receive?** And if you received it, **why do you boast as if it were not a gift?*** (1Co.4:7 NRSV)

If everything belongs to God, then He has the right to do anything that He desires with our stuff. Job was a wealthy man with position. God allowed Satan to cause Job to suffer the loss of everything. When Job was reduced to nothing, he responded:

*Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and **he fell to the ground and worshiped.** And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked I shall return there. **The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD.**" Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God.* (Job 1:20-22 NASB)

Since Job recognized that everything was a gift from God, he could freely accept its loss and still praise his loving Benefactor. The heart of discipleship is giving everything to Christ so that He can use it how He desires. Once, a rich young man came to Jesus, seeking eternal life:

*As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, **what must I do to inherit eternal life?**"* (Mk.10:17 NRSV)

Jesus told him to keep God's commands. However, when the man said that he already obeyed the law, Jesus responded:

*Jesus looked at him and **loved him.** "One thing you lack," he said. "**Go, sell everything you have** and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. **Then come, follow me.**" At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.* (Mk.10:21-22 TNIV)

Jesus told the young man to sell everything and to give to the poor. With a sad heart, the young man walked away; for he was not willing to give up his wealth in order to become a disciple of Christ. Even though Jesus loved the man, He did not chase after the man to negotiate more amicable terms or to compromise His requirements of discipleship. Jesus upheld His standard even though a potential Christian walked away. Jesus still requires Christians to meet this standard:

*In the same way, any of **you who does not give up everything he has** cannot be my disciple.* (Lk.14:33 NIV)

What is excluded from everything? Nothing! Christ gave up everything

Me. And he who does not take his cross and **follow after Me is not worthy of Me.** (Mt.10:37-38 NASB)

When Christ asks us to love Him more than we love anyone else, He asks us to do what He Himself already did. When Christ was born of Mary, He assumed a father/son relationship with God:

*As it is written in the second Psalm: "You are my Son; **today I have become your Father.**"* (Ac.13:33 NIV)

Even though Jesus was God's Son, He was not born from a sexual relationship between God and Mary. Jesus was called the Son of God because of the relationship that He assumed with His heavenly Father:

*You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and **will be called the Son of the Most High.** . . . The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So **the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.*** (Lk.1:31&35 NIV)

Throughout Jesus' life, He valued His relationship with the Father above other earthly relationships. We can clearly see the strong relationship between Jesus and His Father when Jesus was young:

*And He said to them, "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that **I must be about My Father's business?**" But they did not understand the statement which He spoke to them.* (Lk.2:49-50 NKJV)

When Jesus was an adult in ministry, He lived to please the Father:

*And He who sent Me is with Me. **The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him.*** (Jn.8:29 NKJV)

When Jesus' mother and brothers visited Him, Jesus would not allow them to deter Him from the ministry, for Jesus lived to please His Father (God). But during His ministry, Jesus sacrificed not only earthly relationships but also a spiritual relationship. To please God, Jesus took our sins upon Himself and died on a cross. When Jesus died, He sacrificed His relationship with His Father; for sin separates a person from the holy God:

*But your iniquities **have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you** so that He does not hear.* (Isa.59:2 NASB)

Consequently, Jesus suffered rejection and separation from His Father. Jesus willingly forsook His relationship with His Father because Jesus loved us. Jesus Himself experienced the cost of rejection in order to do the will of God:

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"
(Mt.27:46 NKJV)

Therefore, Jesus valued obedience to God more than He valued His relationship with His heavenly Father. Because Jesus sought to please God above all other relationships, Jesus asks us to please Him regardless of the opinions of our loved ones.

According to Luke 14:26, Jesus also requires that we hate our own lives. A person must hate his life under the control of his soul before he will relinquish self-rule and return to his rightful place as God's servant. To become a Christian, a person must deny himself the right to himself:

*Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple **must deny themselves** and take up their cross daily and follow me. (Lk.9:23 TNIV)*

Jesus requires us to do what He Himself already did. When Christ came down to the earth, He denied Himself His rights of divinity and lowered Himself to become a man:

*Christ Jesus: **Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!***
(Php.2:5-8 NIV)

Since Christ denied Himself His rights of divinity, He demands us to deny our rights to self-rule:

If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate . . . even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.
(Lk.14:26 NASB)

Before a person can be a Christian, he must sacrifice his soul and make Jesus the Lord of his life. We must deny ourselves the right to choose our will over God's will:

*Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, **let him deny himself**, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life ^[soul] will lose it, but **whoever loses his life ^[soul] for My sake will find it.** For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and **loses his own soul**? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"*
(Mt.16:24-26 NKJV)

Either a person forfeits his soul's control to Christ, or he forfeits eternal life with Christ and spends eternity in hell apart from God. Unless a person dies to "I," he cannot be Jesus' disciple:

teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.

(Mt.28:19-20 NRSV)

What is excluded from everything? Christ demands absolute, instant obedience from those who follow Him. If a Christian is not willing to obey Jesus, then he is not Jesus' disciple:

And He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father." But He said to him, "Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God."
(Lk.9:59-60 NASB)

Jesus did not compromise His standard of obedience while He walked this earth, and He will certainly not compromise today. Therefore, Christ's call is to follow Him and be obedient in everything. Without absolute, instant obedience, we are not Jesus' disciples and do not possess eternal life!

4. GIVE UP EVERYTHING

The fourth requirement is that a disciple of Jesus must give up everything. Jesus was never vague about the cost of discipleship, nor did He compromise. However, the modern church has neglected to teach these non-negotiables. To be fair, we must present the cost of discipleship to Christians and prospective Christians. The cost of discipleship requires that we humble ourselves and acknowledge that Christ has given us all things. To take pride in what we have accomplished and gained is one of the three areas of temptations:

Do not love the world or the things in the world.** If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the **lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life**—is not of the Father but is of the world. And **the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

(1Jn.2:15-17 NKJV)

We know that the lust of the flesh (sin by actions) and the lust of the eyes (sin by thoughts) are sin, but many Christians do not know that the pride of life is also sin. Hence, if we live for pride in our life's achievements, we will not enter heaven. Before we died to our souls, our souls took pride in our achievements and possessions because these gave us a sense of worth. Because we died to our souls, we find our worth in serving God. We no longer find our worth in achievements

obey Him. Hence, we must obey His Spirit's leading, moment by moment:

*Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect . . . who have been **chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood.*** (1Pe.1:1-2 NIV)

God saved us to enable us to obey Jesus Christ. Paul was a disciple of Christ; he writes:

*Be ye followers of me, **even as I also am of Christ.*** (1Co.11:1 KJV)

Christ is God. Christ not only created and commanded the universe into existence, but He also humbled Himself and obeyed God in everything when He became a servant. Now, Jesus requires Christians to humble themselves and to obey Him in everything:

*Now by this we may be sure that we know him, **if we obey his commandments.** Whoever says, "I have come to know him," but does not obey his commandments, is a liar, and in such a person the truth does not exist; but **whoever obeys his word,** truly in this person the love of God has reached perfection. By this we may be sure that we are in him: **whoever says, "I abide in him," ought to walk just as he walked.*** (1Jn.2:3-6 NRSV)

If we claim to be Christians but do not obey Christ, then the Scriptures call us liars. The Bible gives us a test to see if our relationship with Christ is authentic:

***Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves!** Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you — **unless indeed you fail the test?** But I trust that you will realize that we ourselves do not fail the test.* (2Co.13:5-6 NASB)

The Scriptures command us to test ourselves to see if we possess salvation. Since this test authenticates our Christianity, we must consider what the test is. The test is defined earlier in 2 Corinthians:

*Another reason I wrote you was to see **if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything.*** (2Co.2:9 TNIV)

We pass the test only if we have relinquished self-rule in our baptism and have completely yielded to the Lordship of Christ. We do not earn salvation by passing the test, but the test verifies whether or not Christ controls our lives. The test is based on the great commission:

*Go therefore and **make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and***

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Ga.2:20 NIV)

The Greek verb tense of "I have been crucified" is the perfect tense, passive voice, indicative mood. The Greek perfect tense describes an action that was completed in the past, once and for all without the need to be repeated. Death never needs to be repeated. When we were crucified with Christ, we (our souls) died. Consequently, we no longer control ourselves; but Christ lives through us because we are possessed by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God controls us, and He will never leave us. The verb is not in the active voice, for we cannot put the "I" to death by our own efforts. Rather, the passive voice of "I have been crucified" tells us that the Holy Spirit crucified our souls' domination over us. However, we must accept that our souls died, before we will stop living by our souls. We (our souls) cannot die daily, for we are either dead or alive. Consequently, either we are dead to our souls and indwelt by Christ; or we are controlled by our souls, outside of Christ, spiritually dead.

When we were spiritually dead, we still had spirits; but they were deadened (inoperative). Hence, our spirits could not influence our souls that controlled our bodies. We must remember that our spirits did not die but were deadened, for our bodies without our spirits would be dead:

As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead. (Ja.2:26 NKJV)

Once we were born again, our spirits were given life; and our souls died, losing their control over us. In the same way that our spirits remained in us but were deadened in their ability to control us, now our souls remain in us but are deadened in their ability to control us. When we were born again, our souls did not literally die; for we still have our personalities and preferences. Rather, our souls with their uniqueness still exist, but they are deadened so that we are not controlled by our souls' functions of intellect, emotion, and will. As Christians, we still think. But now our spiritual intuition enhances our human reasoning:

*My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the **full riches of complete understanding,** in order that they may **know the mystery of God, namely, Christ.*** (Co.2:2 NIV)

As Christians, we still feel; but we do not live by our emotions/desires. Because the Holy Spirit indwells us, He shapes our desires so that we desire to please Him:

*Now may the God of peace, . . . equip you with everything good for doing his will, and **may he work in us what is pleasing to him**, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

(He.13:20-21 TNIV)

We still make decisions (will); but now God's Spirit moves us to will according to His purpose:

*For it is **God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.***

(Php.2:13 NRSV)

The Holy Spirit's union with our spirits enables us with our unique souls to live for God. Christ requires that a disciple dies to his soul's control and yields full control of himself to Christ. Christ demands that His disciples return to the position that Adam and Eve rebelled against in the garden—the position of servants under the Lordship of God. One day, a man sought to become Jesus' disciple:

*As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." And Jesus said to him, "**Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.**"*

(Lk.9:57-58 NRSV)

To be a Christian, a person must be willing to deny himself the right to please himself, considering no sacrifice too great. Jesus gave up not only His divine rights but also His earthly comforts so that we could be saved. Now Jesus asks His disciples to deny their rights and earthly comforts and to serve God. A Christian must consider earthly comforts to be of no consequence to him. He must have tunnel vision that solely focuses on Christ. Paul explained Christian servitude best:

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

(Php.1:21 KJV)

Christ denied Himself His divine rights and gave His earthly life on a cross for us. Now Jesus requires His disciples to relinquish their souls' control to Him. If a person does not give over his control to Christ, he cannot be Jesus' disciple and does not possess eternal life. Therefore, to be a disciple, a person must deny himself all the rights of "I" and pledge full dedication and submission to God.

*Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, **so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat.***

(Mk.3:20-21 NIV)

In the same way, we are to humble ourselves and obey the Father, serving our fellowman. We were not saved to enjoy life or to pursue worldly pleasure. We were saved to serve:

But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant.

(Mt.23:11 NKJV)

While a Christian's cross is God's specific purpose for his life, to follow Christ is God's general will for the church. Hence, Christians have no other option but to obey the New Testament:

*Go therefore and **make disciples** of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and **teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.***

(Mt.28:19-20 NRSV)

What is excluded from everything? Nothing! We must obey everything that Christ commands in the New Testament. Today, some Christians disregard certain commands in the New Testament because these commands were God's solutions to specific problems in churches from different cultures. However, God's solutions were universal principles that every Christian must apply:

*For you know what **commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.***

(1Th.4:2 NASB)

In the book of Hebrews, Paul describes Christ:

*Once made perfect, **he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.***

(He.5:9 TNIV)

Many Christians claim to believe in God but refuse to obey Him. If we believe in Christ, we will obey because obedience is the only appropriate response for our faith:

*Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among **all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.***

(Ro.1:5 NIV)

If we claim to believe in God but refuse to obey Him, then we are no better than the demons and will spend eternity with them:

You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe — and tremble!

(Ja.2:19 NKJV)

Demons lived in the presence of God and are sure of His existence; however, they refused to live in obedience to Him. God saved us to

James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. He called them, and **immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him.**

(Mt.4:18-22 NKJV)

Regardless of their station in life, Jesus expected instant obedience from His disciples. Consider Matthew who was a government employee with a lucrative career:

As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, "**Follow me.**" And **he got up and followed him.**

(Mt.9:9 NRSV)

Jesus does not hold a different standard today than He did two thousand years ago. Jesus also calls us to follow Him:

And **whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.**

(Lk.14:27 TNIV)

If a person refuses to follow Jesus, then he cannot be Jesus' disciple—a Christian. Following Christ is different than taking up your cross:

And he who does not take his cross **and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.** He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.

(Mt.10:38-39 NKJV)

To understand what the word "follow" means, we must learn from our leader—Jesus Christ:

- Jesus said to them, "My food **is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work.**" (Jn.4:34 NASB)
- And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I **always do those things that please Him.** (Jn.8:29 NKJV)
- For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me **commanded me what to say and how to say it.** (Jn.12:49 NIV)
- So that the world may know that I love the Father, I **do exactly as the Father commanded Me.** (Jn.14:31 NASB)
- If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, **just as I have obeyed my Father's commands** and remain in his love. (Jn.15:10 NIV)

Christ's life was a life of obedience to the Father. Christ gave up His divine position and came to earth to serve the Father in complete obedience:

... just as **the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve,** and to give his life a ransom for many.

(Mt.20:28 NRSV)

Even though Christ is the Creator, He lowered Himself and served the creature—man:

2. TAKE UP YOUR CROSS

The second requirement is that a disciple of Jesus must take up his cross. When a person surrenders his life to Christ, he is initially willing to give up everything for Him because he is caught up in the "first-love" stage. Our relationship with Christ is similar to a romantic relationship between a man and a woman. When dating couples are infatuated with each other, they are mesmerized by each other's words and actions. In this state of infatuation, one person in the relationship can ask the other person to do almost anything, and the other person is more than willing to oblige. As the relationship progresses, the infatuation fades; and the relationship either grows deeper or ceases to continue. Similar to a dating relationship, when a person becomes a Christian, he is usually infatuated with Christ. Over time, his relationship with Christ either deepens because he is united with Christ in spirit or dwindles because he returns to the world:

But I have this against you, that **you have left your first love.** Therefore remember **from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first;** or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—**unless you repent.** (Re.2:4-5 NASB)

The Christians at Ephesus lost their interest in Christ and returned to following their own dreams and aspirations. In other words, their infatuation with Christ wore off. Christ said that He would denounce them unless they repented and renewed their dedication to Him. Similarly, Jesus requires lifelong service from His disciples. Christ asks us to give up not only our souls but also our hopes and dreams:

And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

(Lk.14:27 TNIV)

The previous verse does not tell a disciple to take up Christ's cross but rather to take up his personal cross that Christ intended for him to bear. To understand what Christ meant by "his own cross" in Luke 14:27, we must grasp what the cross meant to Christ. God's purpose for Christ was to die on the cross by the hands of evil men:

This man was handed over to you **by God's set purpose and foreknowledge;** and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death **by nailing him to the cross.**

(Ac.2:23 NIV)

The cross was God's specific purpose for Christ's coming to the earth:

"Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? **But for this purpose I came to this hour.**" (Lk.9:51 NKJV)

In turn, our cross is Christ's specific purpose for our lives. Before Christ entered Jerusalem, He knew the pain that He would endure; yet the Bible tells us:

*As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus **resolutely set out for Jerusalem.*** (Lk.9:51 NIV)

Christ traveled to Jerusalem, determined to fulfill God's purpose for His life. Jesus disregarded the pain that He would experience on the cross. Throughout Christ's ministry, He spoke of His death on the cross:

From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. (Mt.16:21 TNIV)

Jesus knew what His cross was; and throughout the Bible, He calls us to take up our own cross:

*But if you endure when you do right **and suffer for it**, you have God's approval. **For to this you have been called**, because Christ also suffered for you, **leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps.*** (1Pe.2:20-21 NRSV)

Knowing the future pain of the cross, Christ was not deterred by His cross because it was the Father's purpose for Christ's life. Jesus is our example. We too must embrace God's purpose for our lives:

***God, who has saved us and called us** with a holy calling, not according to our works, but **according to His own purpose** and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.* (2Ti.1:9 NKJV)

God has a specific purpose for every Christian's life. God's purpose for your life is different than His purpose for my life; yet your purpose and my purpose are equally important to Christ and must be completed to fulfill God's overall plan:

*And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to **those who are the called according to His purpose.** For whom He foreknew, He also predestined **to be conformed to the image of His Son.*** (Ro.8:28-29 NKJV)

I cannot fulfill Christ's purpose for your life because I must fulfill His specific purpose for my life. To become a disciple, a person must give up his goals and embrace God's purpose for his life. Hence, if we are not fulfilling God's purpose for us, then we are not saved:

*For we are God's workmanship, **created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*** (Eph.2:10 NIV)

Once a person places his soul under the Lordship of Christ, God's Spirit gains control and works in that new disciple to fulfill His purpose for his life:

*Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; **for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.***

(Php.2:12-13 NRSV)

Because the Holy Spirit lives in us, we serve Him; and He works in us to will and to accomplish His purpose. Our pre-salvation purpose for life and God's purpose for our lives are divergent. We had to surrender our goals in life before we could embrace God's purpose. In the following passage, Jesus warns us to not think about deserting our God-given purpose:

*Another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." Jesus said to him, "**No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.**"*

(Lk.9:61-62 NRSV)

Christ gave up His glory in heaven, came to earth, and embraced the cross for us. Now He requires us to give up our aspirations and dreams and to fulfill His purpose. If we do not embrace God's cross (purpose) for each of our lives, we are not His disciples and will spend eternity in hell!

3. FOLLOW CHRIST

The third requirement is that a disciple must follow Jesus. When I was young, I played "Follow the Leader." My friends and I stood in a single line. Then the first child in the line would lead the other children around the room. The other children copied whatever the leader did. If a child did not do exactly what the leader did, the supervising adult asked the child to leave the game and become a spectator. The last child that followed the leader became the next leader. Similar to the game, Jesus requires His disciples to follow Him. From the very first disciples, Jesus' call was simple—"Follow Me":

*And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Then He said to them, "**Follow Me**, and I will make you fishers of men." **They immediately left their nets and followed Him.** Going on from there, He saw two other brothers,*