

To Take Up Our Cross and Follow Jesus

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“A Study of the Teachings of Jesus Christ”

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[Scripture quotations taken from the NASB](#)

Jesus said: “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he ***must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.***” For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it.” (Luke 9:23-24, emphasis added). We might wonder what Jesus meant by this teaching, and what His words could mean for us as His disciples today.

During Jesus’ lifetime on earth the cross was widely understood to be an instrument of death. With this understanding in mind, to deny ourselves and “take up our cross” to follow Jesus means two things. First, we must deny ourselves, or “die” to anything that is in violation of God’s word. Secondly, we will be called upon to deny ourselves, or “die” to the desire for anything that God may choose to take from us, or withhold from us, as part of His will and plan for each of us individually.

In Luke 14:27 Jesus said: “Whoever does not ***carry his own cross*** and come after Me cannot be My disciple.” A few verses later He also said: “So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not ***give up all*** his own possessions.” (Luke 14:33, emphasis added).

In these two verses from Luke 14, Jesus taught us that as His disciples we must give up, or “die” to, ***all*** that we had hoped to have in this life, and all that we had hoped to be, or experience, or enjoy, or accomplish in our lives, if God should require it of us. In place of what we would have chosen for ourselves, God our

Father calls upon us to submit to the life, place of service, and purpose that He has ordained for us.

This purpose of God's, this place of service that He has ordained for us, will be revealed through the circumstances of our lives that unfold as we walk in obedience to His word. All of the limitations, the difficulties, the hardships of all kinds, and all of the seemingly "good things" that are out of reach for us, are all part of our sovereign God's plan for our lives.

Jesus calls upon us to take up our cross daily, which is to "die" to, or give up, what we want to possess for ourselves and to embrace the life and place of service that God our Father has assigned for us. As we do so, we "lose our lives" for Jesus' sake (Luke 9:24), and we follow Him, becoming like Him in His death (Philippians 3:10).

David wrote of the limitations that God places in the lives of His people in order to bring each of us to the place of service that He has ordained for us. In Psalm 139 we read:

You hem me in behind and before,
and you lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too lofty for me to attain. (Psalm 139:5-6)

And just a few verses later in Psalm 139, David wrote of the sovereignty of God in everything that comes to pass in our lives:

...all the days ordained for me
were written in your book
before one of them came to be. (Psalm 139:16)

Our sovereign God has a particular plan and purpose for each of us as His people. The circumstances that He allows to affect our lives "hem us in" so to speak and limit us. They channel us or guide us into the life and place of service that He has ordained for us.

Dying to, or relinquishing, whatever God may choose to take or withhold from us, and accepting God's will and purpose for our lives, is the principle of spiritual fruit bearing that was at work in Jesus' life, and this same principle will also be at work in the lives of all of us who follow Him. This is the teaching given

to us in John 12:24-26, and in several other passages of Scripture as well. There will be no fruit born without the dying of the “grain of wheat”, that grain of wheat symbolizing our lives and all that we had hoped to have for ourselves in this life. Dying to what we want and obediently accepting God’s assignments in life is what it means to deny ourselves, and to take up our cross and follow Jesus.

We will all be called upon to submit ourselves to God’s plan for our lives as we experience our share in the sufferings of His Beloved Son in the ways and in the measure that God Himself has ordained for each of us. All of the losses and limitations that we experience are a part of God’s sovereign will for our lives. All of the things that we had hoped to have for ourselves in life, but we find that these things are simply out of reach in our case and unattainable for us – all of these things are a part of God’s plan for our lives, and He has promised us that all of these things are working together for our good and for our eternal glory together with His Son (Romans 8:28, 2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

If we are honest about Jesus’ teaching in Luke 9:23-24, 14:27, and 14:33, then we must admit that the Gospel message is not one that will have broad appeal. Men do not want to hear that they must deny themselves and give up everything they have in order to be Jesus’ disciples. They want to hear about how serving God will get them more of what they want out of life, and there are many who will gladly take their money in return for telling them such things. Paul warned us that these things would happen when he wrote: “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.” (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

Notwithstanding all of men’s distortions, fabrications, and myths, the words in these passages of Luke 9 and 14 are Jesus’ words, and men will either accept them as the truth, or they will deny them. Every Christian should understand that it has been granted to us not only to believe the Gospel message (John 6:65, Philippians 1:29), but we will all be called upon to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Jesus, in the ways and in the measure that God has ordained for each of us.

