

The High Cost of Being a Disciple

Philippians 2:21

INTRODUCTION

Today we come to a portion of Scripture that is without doubt one of the saddest in the book of Philippians. In the midst of complimentary comments about Timothy, Paul inserts a devastating truth regarding the servants of Christ who had abandoned their spiritual posts to pursue self-interests.

We will be taking a short intermission today from our study on Timothy as we focus on this comment made by the apostle Paul which summarises the people of God in his day, and is considerably worse in our day.

Paul, speaking of the Christians in Rome, says, *“For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.”*

By *“all”* the apostle does not mean that every single minister in the world had forsaken the pursuits of Christ, but that there was a dearth of true disciples in the Church at Rome who were committed to Christ and his cause. Evidently, Timothy, Epaphroditus, and the Saints in Caesar’s household were still serving with the Apostle at this time.

The wording in the original seems to indicate that Paul was looking for a man in the church at Rome who he could send to the believers in Philippi but none were willing to embark on this three week journey, save Timothy. It was a perilous journey, fraught with danger, and personal injury or death was a real possibility.

Fast forwarding from Paul’s house arrest in Rome in 60AD to 2015AD we find that the spiritual climate of our day is no different. Where are God’s people who are truly committed to His cause? Where are the spiritual servants who are devoted to building the kingdom of God? Where are those who have *“hazarded their lives for Christ (Acts 15:26)?”* Where are the true disciples who have left off ease, safety, pleasure, and personal gain in the service of their Saviour?

Christian, to pursue your own interests is to disregard your discipleship. It is to return to a place of spiritual slavery whereby you are enthroned and Christ is dethroned.

In a very real sense, every Christian will live in Philippians 1:21 or Philippians 2:21. Either the chorus of your life will be *“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain”* or the sad epitaph of your Christian experience will be *“For he/she sought their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.”*

This morning I am preaching a hard-hitting message entitled: *“THE HIGH COST OF BEING A DISCIPLE”*

1 THE MEANING OF DISCIPLESHIP

One of the most misused concepts in the modern church is *“discipleship”*. Most Christians define discipleship in terms of a course or series of teaching modules for new believers. Nothing could be further from the truth!

Discipleship is not a program—it is a LIFE! It begins at the moment of justification and is not finished until the disciple is finally glorified. In other words, discipleship is synonymous with the Christian life.

A *“disciple”* is simply a *“follower, learner, or a pupil.”*

Discipleship is not a fad. It is a life-long pursuit. It is the marshalling of all energies and powers to achieve the final goal – Christlikeness!

The world knows about discipleship.

Football Disciple

Buys membership for big \$\$ EVERY year. The latest jerseys, uniforms etc. They attend every game, dress up for the occasion, scream the name of their hero at the top of their lungs, and will even engage in physical fights with the opposition.

Financial Disciple

Every day he gets up early to get the train to work. He works 8-12 hours a day ensuring that he can afford the best things in life. He wears himself so that he can be comfortable in his retirement. He spends his free time reading the financial times and acquainting himself with the best investments.

Fitness Disciple

This is the individual who gets up before the crack of dawn to be in the gym. He lifts weights, runs hard, and pushes himself because he believes that fitness is the key to happiness and sexual appeal. He clads himself with the appropriate attire, reads the right fitness magazines, plans his food diet meticulously, and strives to emulate a life like his fitness mentors.

WOULD TO GOD THAT WE WOULD OPERATE WITH THE SAME PASSION AND ZEAL AS DISCIPLES OF JESUS CHRIST.

A disciple is not some bystander or an observer from a distance. Discipleship is not a one-day-a-week attendance to church like the pervasive Christian norm of our day. We must not define a disciple in terms of what is observed in Christianity today.

It is imperative that we come to understand true discipleship and what is required.

2 THE MANDATES OF DISCIPLESHIP

TURN TO LUKE 9:23

There are 3 distinctions or mandates of true discipleship found in this text which I would have us look at briefly:

2.1 SELF DENIAL – “IF ANYONE WOULD COME AFTER ME, LET HIM DENY HIMSELF...”

To “come after” the Lord Jesus Christ is to follow him or to be his disciple.

Jesus said that self-denial is essential to true discipleship. This truth is evidenced in a number of places in the Scripture:

Mar 1:16-20 Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men." And immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.

True discipleship involves the same attitude that was present at the time of your conversion. Nobody has ever been saved who did not first forsake all and follow Christ.

“Self-denial” is literally “forgetting or forsaking oneself.”

This is the attitude evident in our Saviour when he “emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant” (Philippians 2:6-7).

The philosophy of the world is that we must “take care of number 1” and the Christian agrees. The only difference between the world and a true disciple of Jesus Christ is the definition of “number one.” Where once it referred to ourselves, it now refers to Jesus Christ!

“Self-denial” is the opposite of what is seen in Philippians 2:21. “Self-denial” is the laying aside of my own interests, goals and agendas.

“Self-denial” is the opposite of selfishness.

One commentator wrote: “Selfishness is the negation of God. It is poison ivy in the garden of life, the rust on the weapons to be used in the battle of life, the moth that ruins the garment of service, the mud in the stream of life, the smoky hearthstone in life’s house, the mouse that gnaws destructively. Selfishness is the atrophy of spiritual muscles, the arthritis of spiritual prowess, the suicide of greatness, the downfall of the soul.”

Before we move on, let me show you from the Bible what discipleship, and specifically, self-denial looks like:

TURN TO LUKE 9:57-62 – Self-denial may bring homelessness, it will mean that will place Christ as the final and absolute priority over all other physical aspects of life.

TURN TO LUKE 14:25-33 – Self-denial will mean that your love for Christ is so radiant that all other relationships pale into insignificance. It will mean that all other aspects of life are renounced in the pursuit of Jesus.

The problem in Rome is that the disciples were consumed with their own ease, safety, personal gain, and were unwilling to deny themselves and pursue Christ.

Dear friends, what stands in the way of your self-denial? Whatever it is forms an idol in your life.

For Demas it was “love for this present age” (2 Timothy 4:10), for Diotrephes it was that he “likes to put himself first” (3 John 9), for Jonah it was that God’s call was incompatible with his own interests (Jonah 1), for the rich man it was his love for his goods and his possessions (Matt.19:16-22).

Discipleship demands denial – self-denial.

It is important to note that this first aspect of discipleship is not an external matter. Self-denial is an attitude, and a mindset. It comes back to the way the disciple views Jesus Christ.

Consider what is written of Moses, long before the Lord Jesus Christ was revealed:

Heb 11:26 He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.

Self-denial comes only as a result of seeing and savouring the value of Christ above all else!

2.2 BEARING ONE’S CROSS – “...TAKE UP HIS CROSS DAILY...”

The second distinction and demand of being a true disciple is taking up the cross daily.

Cross-bearing in the first century had a very different meaning than today.

If someone was carrying their cross, you knew they would soon be mounted upon it and within a short period of time would die. Today people interpret this concept as bearing with difficult circumstances and enduring some aspect of pain. However, this is only a small part of what the Lord Jesus meant.

“Bearing one’s cross daily” speaks of death.

The most interesting word in this verse is “daily”. The disciple is called to “die daily.” It is not a one-time event. This verse denotes custom-made (his) pain, suffering and death. This may include physical martyrdom but it definitely requires the daily death to one’s own desires.

This is undoubtedly what the Apostle Paul refers to in Romans 8:13 and Colossians 3:5

Rom 8:13 For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

Col 3:5 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

Suffering, hardship, persecution is synonymous with being a disciple of Jesus Christ. It is high time we Christians came to understand that we are called to suffer:

1Pe 2:20-21 For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.

Php 1:29-30 For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

The writer of Hebrews gives us some insight into what may be involved when you get serious about being a faithful disciple:

Heb 11:32-38 And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated—of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

Taking up one’s cross signifies a willingness to go to any extent for Christ. It denotes a total commitment and passion for Christ.

2.3 OBEDIENCE – “...FOLLOW ME.”

To follow Christ is to walk as he walked. It is to submit to his commands.

Like the Sunday School song says, “Obedience is the very best way to show that you believe.”

Christ did not obey His heavenly Father because He had to – He did so because He loves Him.

Joh 14:31 but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father.

Love must always be the motive for obedience. A true disciple who loves Christ does not find obedience laborious or dutiful but delightful.

1Jn 5:3 For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.

Discipleship speaks of lordship. By “lordship” we refer to Christ’s sovereign rule over us and that we are his bond-slaves who voluntarily and joyfully serve Him.

CONCLUSION

Paul indictment of the believers in Rome was sweeping and severe. The reality was that no-one at that time was prepared to pursue the interests of Christ.

This is true of the 21st century church too. Most will only serve Christ when the gain from such an endeavour is compatible with their own.

In others words, "I'll serve Christ only to the extent that it ministers to my own needs/desires." This is NOT self-denial at all!

We MUST come to a place where what we want is not even in view. What I am calling us to is radical Christianity. It is the demands of a true disciple of Jesus Christ. It is forsaking all to follow Him. It is standing up and out in a generation of blasé, lukewarm, casual Christians and following Christ no matter what may come.

In closing, I want to read a portion from Ezekiel 22 which I believe is as relevant today in the lives of God's people as it was in the direct context of the Children of Israel to whom it was written.

READ Ezekiel 22:23-31

Dear friends, discipleship comes at a high cost. Are you prepared to pay the price of being a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ?