
The Conditions Of Discipleship

*“Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me’”
(Matthew 16:24).*

We know what our salvation cost Jesus: His blood. The cross He experienced showed no mercy. It offered no compromises and struck no bargains. As He approached the cross, Jesus looked upon it and said, “I know what you do. I have come to offer on you My life and blood for the sins of the human race.”

We also know what salvation costs us: *nothing*, for it is a free gift. Paul said that we are saved by grace, by the free gift of God’s love (Ephesians 2:9). We receive this wonderful grace and stand in it by obedient faith. Salvation cannot be bought or earned.

Further, we know what discipleship costs—but we are not as eager to think about that price. What does it cost for one who has been saved by grace to walk daily in the footsteps of Jesus? He laid down four conditions for following Him.

The first condition is decision. As Jesus called us to discipleship, His first word was “if.” Discipleship is optional. Jesus’ statement affirms His universal love for humanity (anyone can come) and His respect for free will (we must choose to come). Anyone who wishes to do so may come, but no one is coerced to accept His invitation. Each hearer must decide for himself on the basis of the evidence that the message of the New Testament provides.

The second condition is denial. This is severe and obligatory. Jesus said, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself.” This condition involves genuine repentance. If Jesus is to save a person, He must save him from himself. Deliverance comes only by a denial of the enslaved, misguided, and corrupted self. No one

by his own strength can shed the chains with which sin, in its capture of self, has bound him.

The third condition is death. Jesus said, “Take up your cross.” Through death our souls are set free to serve the Lord. The service that we are called to render is embodied in the word “cross.” We are asked to lay down our lives for Him and for others (see 1 John 3:16).

In Galatians Paul brought the “denial” and the “cross” of our Lord’s statement together and pictured the transformation that takes place when one chooses to follow Christ. He said, “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me” (Galatians 2:20). When the life that we live in Christ conflicts with the secular and religious world, we must crucify “self” in some form.

The fourth condition gives us direction. Jesus said, “Follow Me.” This is an invitation to experience His spiritual life, a challenge to be what He is in the world, and a promise of a new life. Choosing to follow Him is the only way to experience true life, the life of fulfillment in service to the world. We are to die to ourselves so that we might live in service to our Master.

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We may choose whether or not to follow Jesus; but we must face the consequences of our choice—a life of victory or a life of death.