

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby. - 1 Peter 2:2

THE SINCERE MILK OF GOD'S WORD

The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword... - Hebrews 4:12

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The Commitment Christ Demands

In **Luke 14**, Jesus spoke of the commitment of being His disciple. Using illustrations such as counting the cost before building a tower (**verses 28-30**), Jesus pointed out the need to "count the cost" of *following Him (v. 26-27,33)*.

In **Luke 14:26**, Jesus said, "*If anyone comes to me, and doesn't disregard his own father, mother, wife, children, brothers, and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he can't be my disciple.*" Jesus' point in this verse is not to demean the importance of earthly families, but to teach that we must prioritize pleasing Him above even those closest to us.

Being an obedient Christian often involves going against what someone we are close to desires of us. It may involve angering a family member or close friend. Jesus does not want us to seek conflict *for the sake of conflict (Rom. 12:18)*, but He desires us to follow Him, regardless of what conflicts may result (cf. **Matt. 10:34-37**). Rejection is an unfortunate but real part of following Christ (**2 Tim. 4:16**).

Jesus went on to say in **Luke 14:33**, "*whoever of you who doesn't renounce all that he has, he can't be my disciple.*"

Jesus' point *here* is not that we must make ourselves miserable while on earth, but that we must not allow *anything* to come between us and pleasing God.

Developing the mindset Jesus is calling for requires us to see Christianity the way it is described in the New Testament.

Romans 12:1 says, "*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your*

reasonable service." This is a *lifestyle* of commitment to God.

When Paul was in prison and uncertain about his future, he said "*For to me live is Christ, but to die is gain*" (**Phil. 1:21**).

Notice the phrase "*for me to live is Christ.*" Christ was not just a part of Paul's life. He was the *center* of it.

Because of Paul's dedication to the Lord, he was willing to make drastic changes. Imagine how uncomfortable it would have been for him to turn from zealously opposing Christ to zealously working for Christ. Making uncomfortable changes is part of the "cost" of following Jesus.

Much of what makes changing for Christ difficult is the reaction we receive from others. Friends who we once joined with in sinful activities may think we're strange, and speak badly of us (**1 Pet. 4:4**). This is an example of persecution, which is also part of the "cost" of following Christ. Paul told Timothy that "*all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution*" (**2 Tim. 3:12**).

For Paul, this included *physical* persecution.

In our time and place, persecution may be mental. We might be treated harshly even if we are not *physically* harmed for our stand for truth (cf. **Matt 5:10-12**). We might be taken advantage of for doing right (cf. **Rev. 13:17**).

The point of all of this is that following Christ is not just about sacrificing a fishing trip on Sunday morning to assemble with saints. This could be included, but it just scratches the surface of the commitment of following Christ.

We must determine not to let *anything* stand in the way of *any part* of God's will for our lives. No matter how difficult such a commitment may be, we must put God's will above all. This is the message of **Luke 14:26-33**.

“Blessed Are the Merciful”

God’s mercy is well exemplified in the life of the apostle Paul. Before Paul was converted, he bore the name Saul and zealously persecuted those who followed Jesus (**Acts 8:3**).

As he was traveling to Damascus to find Christians to persecute, Saul was met by Jesus who asked, “*Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?*” (**Acts 9:4**). Saul learned that he had been living in sin. He learned what he needed to do to be forgiven, and then did it. Because of Saul’s submission to God’s requirements, he was forgiven by Him.

When Paul looked back on this, he realized that he was undeserving of God’s mercy (**1 Tim. 1:15-16**).

In his letter to the Romans, Paul pointed out that we’ve *all* done things that make us undeserving of God’s mercy (**Rom. 3:23**). No matter what an individual has done in the past, though, he or she can be forgiven by God. This is a testament to the merciful character of our Creator.

The mercy God directs toward mankind is strong motivation for *us* to show mercy to *others*. In **Matthew 5:7**, Jesus said, “*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.*”

Part of showing mercy, or pity, toward others involves giving a helping hand to those in need as we have the ability and opportunity (cf. **Luke 6:35-36**).

A more specific way we should show mercy is to show a willingness to forgive,

as God has toward us. Like God demonstrated with His attitude toward Saul of Tarsus, He desires the salvation of sinners, instead of harboring bitterness or resentment toward us for sins we’ve committed (cf. **2 Pet. 3:9**). We should likewise have this merciful spirit toward those who’ve mistreated us.

In **Matthew 18:23-35**, Jesus spoke a parable that well-illustrates how God’s mercy should affect us. This parable tells of a servant whose master was willing to forgive him of a debt he could not pay, but this same servant was unwilling to show mercy toward a fellow servant.

An interesting thing about this parable is that the servant owed his master “*ten thousand talents*” (**verse 24**), while his fellow servant owed him “*one hundred denarii*” (**verse 28**). The servant owed his master about 600,000 times as much as his fellow servant owed him.

This contrast has a lesson for us. No matter how much one has wronged us, it doesn’t compare to how much we have wronged God. Without Christ’s sacrifice, the “debt” we owe God could never be paid. If God is willing to show us mercy, how much more should we be willing to show others mercy?

To look at the other side of the coin, if we are *unwilling* to show others mercy, God will not show us mercy. This is seen in **Matthew 5:7** when we consider that it’s those who are merciful to others who “*shall obtain mercy*” (cf. **Matt. 6:14-15**).

-Michael Hickox (both articles)