

Following Jesus And Cross Bearing

By R.T. Nusbaum

*"And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after Me, is not worthy of Me."
Matthew 10:38*

It is not merely a question of are we following Christ. The crux of the matter is have we taken up the Cross? Notice carefully how the above scripture is written. There is an order to the call to become disciples of Jesus Christ. First, we must take up our Cross; only then may we follow after Him. It is not, "first follow Me, and later take your Cross." The Cross is step one. Taking up the Cross is basic to our following Christ, not something we are called to do after many years.

Following Without Death

The Christian's life is frequently one of many ups and downs containing a few victories sprinkled in amongst many defeats. For many there is a cycle of trying, failing, and trying again, continually striving against sin. The Christian is told to redouble their efforts in prayer, Bible study, and church attendance. What is the problem here? It is simply this: we attempt to follow before we have died. It is unfortunate that after many years of service the Lord still has to call us back to the Cross.

Surrender Replaces The Cross

Unfortunately, it is not the cross that is preached nowadays but a surrender or "near death experience", but it is not real death. The convert merely changes his conduct, cries a few tears, yet he still lives. He knows the Cross only as something Jesus died on for him. The Cross does not represent his own death, but his Lord's death.

Following Christ Vs. Taking Up The Cross

If we were to ask someone how they know they are following Christ, they are likely to point to a time in which they prayed the sinner's prayer and received Christ. But following Christ is not tied to salvation but to the Cross. Have you taken up the Cross? Have you died?

Even the term "born-again" implies a death, and a re-birthing. Has this been your experience, or is it just a euphemism for "getting religious"? Some claim a born-again experience when it is clear that they have not died at all! Christ does not call us to CLEAN up our life, but to GIVE up our life. So the issue is not if you are one of the multitudes following Christ, but rather, have you taken up the Cross?

Deny Yourself

God does not require Jesus to take up the cross and die daily for our sins, yet He tells us to take up our Cross daily and follow Him. What is this? Our passage in Luke gives us a clue that the passage in Matthew does not give. We have focused on taking up the Cross first, and then following Jesus. Now let us discuss the prelude to taking up the Cross: "let him deny himself."

The physical cross is nothing in and of itself. If someone understands us to say that there is intrinsic power in a wooden upright post and crossbeam then they miss the point. The Cross is a principle, a standard, symbolizing self-denial. When we speak of Christ's death on the physical cross it is merely an instrument of death and it was a once-and-for-all event. But Matthew 10:38 speaks of the Cross as a call to self-denial and discipleship. That is because it is something more than a method of execution, it is an attitude of daily denying of Self, submitting one's life into the Hand of Another, and giving ourselves up to die to our own will that we may follow His will.

Taking Up The Cross Daily

"And [Jesus] said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me (Luke 9:23)."

We desire the Lord's Life daily, so we must have His Death working in us daily. There is no resurrection without crucifixion. The answer to why there is so little power and genuine spiritual fruit in the lives of those who follow Jesus is a simple one: they desire the Life of the Lord, but not His Death. They want a daily pouring out of the Lord's Life, but they shun the prospect of daily sharing in His Death.

Why does Life In The Spirit Ministries commit to teaching the Cross in depth? Why do we belabor the point incessantly? Because the saints of the Lord are well instructed in living victoriously, being blessed, walking in power, overcoming the enemy, and living up to their potential. By comparison, the majority of them know next to nothing about self-denial, bearing their Cross, boasting in their weaknesses, being joyful in trials, winning by losing, gaining by giving up, working by resting, accepting both the bitter and the sweet as gifts from God, enduring hardness and accepting suffering. God desires to increase us and enlarge us; He therefore calls us to go back to the Cross and start over again. Christ says we must die in order to live; we must first take up the Cross before we are fit to follow Jesus. This is the call of the Cross. Who will accept it?