

Marks of a True Disciple

The Call of the Disciple

Luke 9:23-26 (primarily v. 23)

After finishing our series on the resurrection and redemption, it seemed fitting not only to ask what Christ has done for us, but what kind of people Christ calls us to be. The risen Christ does not merely give us hope for the future; He claims our lives in the present. So, in this series, we want to consider Marks of a True Disciple — those marks that identify the life of one who truly follows Jesus Christ. This is not a study in advanced Christianity, nor is it a lesson only for new believers. It is a call for every one of us to ask: Am I truly following Christ as He Himself defines it?

There are many people who admire Jesus who do not follow Him. There are many who are interested in Christ, moved by some things He said, helped by the life He lived, or even comfortable around Christian things — yet they have never really come to understand Christ's call upon their own life. Our Lord never hid what it meant to follow Him. He never softened the demands of discipleship in order to gather a crowd. In fact, when men were drawn to Him, He often spoke in ways that sifted them.

That is exactly what we find in Luke 9. In this chapter the Lord Jesus has revealed His identity, foretold His suffering, and begun to make plain that the way of the Master will also be the way of His followers. Then in verse 23 He speaks words that are among the clearest and most searching in all the Gospels: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me."

This is not just a word to preachers, missionaries, or unusually zealous Christians. This is Christ's call to every true disciple. And in these verses, we see that the call to follow

Christ is a call that reaches the will, the self, the path, and the whole direction of life.

Many want Christ as an addition to life: help for burdens, comfort for fears, peace for troubles. But Christ does not present Himself as an addition to life. He presents Himself as Lord. He does not ask for a place in our lives; He claims the throne.

I. A DECLARED REQUIREMENT (v. 23A)

“And he said to them all, If any man will come after me...”

A. It is an authoritative call — “And He said to *them* all...”

The Lord is not making suggestions here. He is speaking as the Master and the terms of discipleship are not ours to rewrite.

B. It is a universal call — “If any man...”

This directive wasn’t restricted to the apostles only, nor to preachers, missionaries, or especially devoted believers. Christ addresses “them all.” The call of discipleship is the call that Christ lays before every true believer.

C. It is a voluntary call — “If any man will...”

“Will” (θέλω) — this implies active volition and will. Christ does not force believers to follow Him — He calls them, and they must willingly come.

D. It is a personal call — “come after me”

1. The word for “after” (ὀπίσω) is one that means behind or in back of. It can be understood as Jesus saying, “If anyone wants to come behind

Me as one following after me.”

2. The imagery is not a disciple that is walking beside Christ as an equal, or walking ahead of Christ setting the course. He is coming behind Christ — Christ leads; the disciple follows.

Matthew 4:19

¹⁹ And he saith unto them, **Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.**

John 10:27

²⁷ **My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:**

- It is possible to be a faithful church goer, be knowledgeable of Christian truth and biblical terminology, and yet never truly have “come after” Christ.

II. A DENIED SELF (V. 23B)

“...let him deny himself...”

The first command of discipleship is self-denial.

A. This is deeper than self-discipline (Rom. 6:6-13)

This is not simply giving up some outward thing; it is the renouncing of self as the ruling principle of life.

B. This is the rejection of self-rule

To deny self is to take oneself off the throne and let Christ rule our lives.

Galatians 2:20

²⁰ I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

2 Corinthians 5:15

¹⁵ And *that* he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.

C. This is necessary because self opposes Christ

A person cannot follow Christ while clinging to the right to govern his own life. The natural man wants Christ as helper, but not as sovereign. Discipleship begins when self steps down and the Lord is given His rightful place.

D. This is the fruit of grace, not the cause of salvation

This needs to be made clear. Christ is not teaching salvation by self-denial. He is describing the life of one who truly follows Him. Grace not only forgives; it transforms as well. The grace that saves us also teaches us to renounce ungodliness and self-rule.

Titus 2:11–12

¹¹ For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, ¹² Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;

III. A DAILY CROSS (V. 23C)

“...and take up his cross daily...”

A. The cross speaks of shame and suffering

In our understanding today, people often speak of a burden as “my cross to bear,” but that’s not what Jesus meant here. In the first century, the cross was an instrument of shame, rejection, suffering, and death. To “take up” the cross was to embrace reproach and loss.

Romans 8:17

¹⁷ And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with *him*, that we may be also glorified together.

B. The cross speaks of identification with Christ

A true disciple is willing to be identified with Christ whatever the cost may be. He does not hide his allegiance when it becomes inconvenient, unpopular, or costly.

Matthew 10:38

³⁸ And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.

Luke 14:27

²⁷ And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.

2 Timothy 3:12

¹² Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

C. The cross speaks of continual practice

“Daily” (I preached a message on this word in January) — Luke is the only one of the three gospel writers that give this detail of this teaching. This is a daily willingness to die to self, endure reproach, and obey Christ.

D. The cross is not hardship in general

Every difficulty and trial in life is not “the cross” in the sense that Jesus meant here. This refers specifically to the cost that comes from following Him faithfully. It is the willing embrace of whatever obedience to Christ requires.

- Sometimes taking up the cross:
 - May mean public reproach;
 - May mean obedience when on one is watching;
 - May mean refusing the approval of men;
 - May mean saying yes to Christ when the flesh and the world both say no.

IV. A DETERMINED FOLLOWING (V. 23D)

"...and follow me."

A. This is present following

The tense of this verb (present active imperative) points to ongoing action. This isn't a one-time response only, but a continuing pattern. In other words, a true disciple is one who keeps on following no matter what happens.

John 12:26

²⁶ If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour.

PThis is personal following

As before, the object is Christ Himself. The true disciple follows His Word, His will, His example, and His way.

Colossians 2:6

⁶ As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him:

B. This is submissive following

To follow Christ as the Bible describes is to walk under His Lordship. The true disciple doesn't chart his own course and ask Christ to bless it, although

that seems to be the natural way today. He follows where Christ leads.

John 21:19

¹⁹ This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, **Follow me.**

John 21:22

²² Jesus saith unto him, **If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me.**

C. This is steadfast following

Following Christ is not seasonal or when it's convenient. It is the settled direction of life.

This point is important. Too many new converts start off with great desire and enthusiasm but because they aren't taught what it means to be a true disciple of Christ, they fall away from following Him.

1 John 2:6

⁶ He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.

- The issue is not whether we once professed Christ, but whether we are presently following Him. Are our choices, priorities, loves, and loyalties shaped by Christ?

V. A DRAMATIC REINFORCEMENT (vv. 24-26)

These verses reinforce the seriousness of Christ's call.

A. The paradox of life and loss (v. 24)

The one who clings to this life and to self will ultimately lose everything. On the other hand, the one who yields himself to Christ finds what true life really is. What seems like loss in following Christ is in

reality true gain.

Matthew 10:39

³⁹ He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.

John 12:25

²⁵ He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.

Philippians 3:7–8

⁷ But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. ⁸ Yea doubtless, and I count all things *but* loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them *but* dung, that I may win Christ,

B. The poverty of worldly gain (v. 25)

Even the greatest earthly success is no profit if the soul is lost (Psalm 49:6-9; Luke 12:16-21).

Mark 8:36–37

³⁶ For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? ³⁷ Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

C. The peril of shame (v. 26)

1. A shame that is personal — “ashamed of me”

This is shame concerning Christ Himself. It is the shrinking back from open identification with Him because His name brings reproach.

2. A shame that is doctrinal — “and of my words”

A person cannot honor Christ and at the same time despise or hide His words.

3. A shame that is revealing

The language in this verse is not pointing to a moment of weakness, but to a settled shrinking from Christ because of fear, disgrace, or love of the world.

a) Peter denied the Lord in a moment of weakness, yet was broken over his sin and restored.

b) But the one Christ describes here is one who will not own Him, because He is ashamed of Him.

➤ This does not mean, as some teach it, that every hesitant believer who has failed in witness is lost. It is meant to expose the heart of the one who refuses identification with Christ and His truth.

4. A shame that is answered (Matt. 10:32-33; Mark 8:38)

“of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father’s, and of the holy angels.”

a) This means that Christ will refuse to acknowledge a person as His own in the day of His appearing. The one who disowns Christ now will be disowned by Christ then.

b) The true disciple may falter, and even fail grievously for a time, but he cannot make peace with being ashamed of Christ. The intention of his heart is to own Christ, confess Christ, and stand with Christ and His words.

Romans 1:16

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

2 Timothy 1:8

⁸ Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God;

2 Timothy 1:12

¹² For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.

Conclusion:

The question before us this morning is whether we are following Christ on His terms. Those terms aren't hidden; they aren't benign, or ambiguous. He lays them out plainly: deny self, take up the cross daily, and follow me.

And yet there is grace even in the severity of this call. The One who calls us is the One who first went to the cross for us. He does not ask His people to walk a path He Himself refused to walk. He has loved us, redeemed us, and risen again, and now He calls us after Himself.

So this is where discipleship begins. It begins with a clear and personal call from Christ. Not just to a better life as we define it, but to Himself. And the right response to that call is to say, "Lord, I am Thine. Lead me, and I will follow."

Let every one of us ask honestly before God: Am I following Christ, or merely carrying the name of Christ? Have I denied self, or simply tried to add Jesus to my own plans? The call of the disciple is still the same today, and blessed is the man who answers it.