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Swindoll's Living Insight New Testament Commentary - Luke



As usual, Luke establishes the context before describing the Lord's actions or teaching. He always defines the circumstances, the audience, and the place. In this case, Jesus was in motion, presumably toward Jerusalem, and the crowds were "going along" with him. Luke undoubtedly writes this in the literal sense of "traveling with," but we cannot discount the figurative sense of "following blindly." The phrase "He turned and said" usually introduces a rebuke, a correction, or a clarification (7:9, 44; 9:55; 10:23). Jesus would not have discouraged the act of following; He did, however, challenge their motivation.

(In Luke chapter 14) Jesus clarified the cost of following Him with the first of three exacting qualifications, without which one "is not able to be My disciple" (the exact Greek phrase repeated in vv. 26, 27, and 33). The Lord introduced each qualification with a negative condition:

"If anyone...does not..." (v. 26).

"Whoever does not..." (v. 27).

"None...who does not..." (v. 33)

The conditions should not be understood as works necessary for salvation but as evidence of commitment following conversion. In other words, Jesus listed these conditions as a kind of litmus test of genuine discipleship, issuing them for two purposes. First, to challenge each individual to put his or her own attitudes to the test. Second, to warn all who would consider following that discipleship is costly. All three conditions call for the true disciple to give Christ priority over all other things, including relationships (v. 26) and plans (vv. 27-32), which necessarily calls for the sacrifice of possessions (v. 33).

Priority in Relationship

To interpret the Lord's words correctly, one must be familiar with the ancient Near Eastern concept of "hate," which is different from our modern use of the term. In twenty-first-century America, hate is "intense hostility and aversion usually deriving from fear, anger, or sense of injury; extreme dislike or antipathy: loathing." In the literature of ancient Near Eastern cultures, hate is a matter of priorities. For example, Esau "despised" his birthright when he chose a bowl of soup over his covenant blessing (Gen. 25:29-34). Esau didn't have intense negative emotions about his birthright—he certainly didn't "hate" it as we would use the term—in fact, he fought hard to regain what he had lost and was inconsolable when he failed.

In another example, Genesis 29 tells the story of Jacob's two wives and how he "loved" Rachel and "hated" her sister, Leah. Again, the term indicates Jacob's choice to favor one over the other. He couldn't have been too repulsed by Leah. He did, after all, conceive seven children with her! The issue is choice or priority, irrespective of one's feelings. You could say hatred is as hatred *does*.

Jesus didn't want His disciples to cultivate a deep loathing for people or to treat others cruelly. He called for them to make a clear, definable, decisive choice to make Him their number one priority over all other relationships, including love for self.

Priority in Plans

When the Romans executed a prisoner by crucifixion, they made the entire process as humiliating as it was excruciating. After stripping the victim naked for flogging, they hung a sign around his neck listing his crimes. He was then forced to carry the implement of his own death through the city streets to the place of execution. Therefore, to "carry one's own cross" is to bear the public scorn of discipleship and to accept the inevitable suffering it brings.

Note the phrase "and come after Me." It expresses the idea of getting in line behind someone. In the same manner as the masses followed after Jesus on His way to Jerusalem, true disciples place their feet in His footsteps...all the way up to Golgatha, the place of crucifixion. The Lord's call includes a commitment to the kingdom cause that is as selfless and as complete as His own. In a practical sense, discipleship requires placing all other goals, objectives, plans, and personal desires under those of the Father. The truly committed follower releases his or her own will while embracing the Father's will. Later, in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus will prostrate Himself before His Father and pray, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done" (22:42).

Jesus offers two analogies to illustrate conscious, eyes-wide-open commitment. Both depict people making all-or-nothing decisions before proceeding. Once the cost of building is counted, construction must proceed to completion or the builder faces public shame. A king must commit all his forces to battle to achieve victory or else petition for peace. Half-fought battles make no sense. Jesus didn't want foolhardy promises; fickle disciples do the cause more harm than good. No, He wants only those who take on the hardships with a reasonable understanding of the cost and who will then stand firm in their commitment to the end.



