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Garland's Exegetical Commentary on the
New Testament - Luke.



The Total Demand of Discipleship

Many who come to Christ have no idea in advance what this decision will eventually cost them. The church makes the problem of those falling by the wayside worse when things get tough by soft-selling the requirements of discipleship. Church leaders can become too interested in keeping up attendance and keeping down conflict and, as a result, dilute Jesus' radical demands. Some may be anxious about turning off people. This unit makes clear that discipleship is costly. If it is to be compared to a king preparing to go to war, disciples must be prepared to throw everything into a life-and-death battle. It will not be a gentle stroll through the rose garden.

In other words, discipleship is only "for those who have considered the worth of the enterprise with Jesus and are prepared to pay the price for sharing it." Jesus does not hide his extreme requirements in the fine print but proclaims them boldly in headlines. The object is not to scare potential disciples away, which it may well do, but to enlist those who are ready to stake all with fervor on a decision that they have first considered in cold blood. Faithful discipleship that will stick it out to the end does not rest on a momentary burst of feeling. Enthusiasm may wane as quickly as it blazes up.

Jesus makes a total demand that would crush the autonomous spirit of those who want to do their own thing or who are in it for what they can get out of it. He does not want disciples who simply want to go along for the ride, soaking up his teaching while leaving fundamental values, loyalties, and manner of life unchanged. For Jesus, discipleship is an either/or proposition and is to be entered into with fear and trembling because it requires transformation.

The Renunciation of All Things for Christ

To follow Jesus requires being able to renounce all material goods and possessions. It entails giving up the quest for earthly security that material wealth promises. It is the trap that Judas fell into when he betrayed his lord for money (22:3-5). It requires the abandonment of all projects, plans, and personal goals that one cooks up in the course of one's life, usually for the purpose of redounding to one's personal honor. Schweizer makes the challenging observation that "there is no such thing as a totally middle-class discipleship."

The tendency in an affluent culture is to dilute Jesus's radical demands. To follow Jesus is not a "low risk" or a "low cost" venture, however, as his personal example makes clear. Disciples cannot play it safe. To become a disciple of Jesus is to embark on a stony path leading to an uncertain future in this life and the possibility that a cross will stand at the end of the road (9:62; 14:27). It requires being able to give up the intrinsic love for one's own life. Peter,

who will follow Jesus from afar after his arrest and deny him under gentle pressure (22:54-62) shows how hard it is to bear the cross with him all the way to the end.

To follow Jesus means to loosen sacred family ties (8:19-21; 11:27-28; 9:59-60; 14:26; 18:28-30). Disciples must be willing to sacrifice what they love most in the world – to give up something that goes against the prompting of human nature – the love of wife, child, and family. This word cannot be easily softened, perhaps only ignored. What it means is that discipleship to Christ must take precedence over all other relationships in life and the securities they offer. It requires redefining those relationships with some measure of detachment.

The demands to forsake family and immaterial security are introduced in 9:57–62 when Jesus responds to three potential followers. In 12:49–53, he emphasizes the divisiveness of his message, explaining that even families will be divided and relatives will oppose disciples. In 18:18–30, Jesus addresses "a certain ruler" who becomes sad at Jesus' demand that he sell everything he owns. These incidents reveal that the choice is not between Jesus and the devil. It is far more subtle. It is between Jesus and our strongest allegiances: Jesus and family, Jesus in business, or Jesus and profit. These stipulations become a stumbling block that God uses to reveal our heart's desire, which may be unknown even to us. They become a means of revelation that will either draw us closer to God or alienate us further.

This call for self-denial may seem extreme and unreasonable, but "the point of discipleship is to be like one's master." This is what Jesus did. Subordinating security, home, and family to Christian commitment does not mean that one discards these things entirely. Renouncing them is not for the sake of renunciation, but for the purpose of service. Bernadino comments, "True love and concern for family, friends, and one's own self (see 14:26, 27, 33) depend upon a genuine discernment of values in the Christ." He continues, "one renounces selfish concern out of trust in God's love which must inevitably express itself in love for one's fellow man."

Counting the Cost of Not Following Christ

The emphasis in the two parables of the tower builder and the king going to war is on counting the cost. Becoming a disciple of Jesus is a serious matter, as costly as building a tower, and as dangerous as going to war when you are outnumbered by two to one. But discipleship is not a matter of prudent risk management. From a worldly point of view, becoming a disciple is clearly imprudent since the enemy's power seems so overwhelming. But one should also count the cost of *not* following Jesus.

What the text does not spell out is that one will lose everything anyway whatever one's choice. Knowles points out, "the only question is whether one will lose all as a follower of Jesus and for the sake of God's reign, or as one who refuses to follow and obey. Which, in other words, is the more promising course of action?" Counting the cost and concluding that the risk is too great and not worth the effort is a viable option. Unconditional surrender to an invading king, if it is Satan, for example, will lead to ultimate ruin. One therefore should count the cost of *not* following Jesus. If the option is unconditional surrender to Jesus or Satan, the former is the only one that will prove to be the wise choice.



