

Monday morning ... time to look into the Word together. I trust today's Devotional will be a blessing and a help to you.

QUESTION: ARE WE REALLY FOLLOWING JESUS?

A Devotional prepared by Dr. Robert L. Morris

Posted on July 19, 2021

“And He was saying to all, ‘If anyone desires to come after (follow) Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross every day, and follow Me.’” (Luke 9:23; my translation)

What is involved in living the Christian life? Undoubtedly, thousands of sermons have been preached and thousands of Bible studies taught to millions of people ... designed to answer that simple question. These do not all agree! For example, there are those who have the idea that to believe in the historic Jesus automatically makes one a “Christian.” There are others who believe that some form of religious exercise such as attending church regularly is the means to redemption. Still there those who believe that partaking of certain sacraments will bring one to the eternal blessing of heaven. And then, there are those who believe a life of excessively denying one’s self of any intellectual or physical personal pleasures, or living a life of altruistic abstinence in behalf of others will result in eternal acceptance by God. But, what did Jesus teach about following Him and thereby being accepted by God?

For my Greek students through the years, I will give you the Greek text used by Dr. Luke is extremely helpful. ἔλεγεν δὲ πρὸς πάντας, εἴ τις θέλει ὀπίσω μου ἔρχεσθαι, ἀρνησάσθω ἑαυτὸν καὶ ἀράτω τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ καθ’ ἡμέραν, καὶ ἀκολουθεῖτω μοι. My translation from above is quoted again here: “And He was saying to all, ‘If anyone desires to come after (follow) Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross every day, and follow Me.’” What lessons flow from this statement of Jesus?

1. A DECISION RELATED IMMEDIATELY TO A DESIRE.

“If anyone desires to come after Me...”

Following Jesus involves a personal decision on the part of the person desiring eternal life. It is the exercise of the will that is involved. The verb θέλει in the Greek text is the third person singular, indicative mood, present tense, and active voice, of the primary verb θέλω - thelo. In exercising one’s will, this the basic meaning of this verb identifies an action based on a motive of desire, wish, or want. When it is followed by an infinitive, as it is in Luke 9:23 – the infinitive ἔρχεσθαι – erchesthai, meaning “to come,” or “to go,” it implies a readiness or an inclination because the person is ready to come or go, and he or she is pleased to come or go, and that person has a strong desire to come or go. Therefore, the teaching of Jesus focuses on one’s personal desire to “come after,” to “to follow after or with” Jesus. That person is also ready and prepared to do so. The natural implication is, therefore, whatever Jesus commands or instructs one to do, there is a personal willingness to follow, because of the personal desire and readiness. Jesus also addressed the issue of being one of His followers.

2. A DEDICATION RELATED IMMEDIATELY TO A DEMAND.

“...he must deny himself, and take up his cross...”

Jesus was very careful to communicate to the whole world that desiring to follow, meaning to come after Him, is related to the demands that He set before us. “deny himself” and “take up his cross.” The idea of “self-denial” is not something new to “religion.” “Deny” and “take up” are the two key words here. Jesus stated as the first demand for following Him is to deny one’s self. The word He used as reported by Dr. Luke, is ἀρνησάσθω – arnesastho (the letter “e” in the transliteration is pronounced like a long “a,” or ā. This word is a 3rd person singular, aorist tense - (completed action), imperative mood – (required, demanded). It is not an option, or a “hope-so” idea. It is just what Jesus said ... an imperative, a requirement for following after Him, which is discipleship, living a Christian life. The root word is ἀρνέομαι - arneomai – and is the opposite to ὁμολογέω – homologeō which means “to confess” or “admit.” ἀρνέομαι – arneomai is the “refusing,” “renouncing,” “disowning,” or “denying” word in the Greek New Testament. Quite literally, it indicates a renouncing, a denying of one’s personal desires if those desires are contrary to the plain, clear teaching of the Word of God. It is a rigorous abstention from self-indulgence in order to be obedient to Christ. It is a strict self-denial as a measure of one’s personal spiritual discipline.

The second “demanding word” from Jesus is ἀράτω – arato, again a 3rd person singular, aorist tense, imperative form of the verb ἄιρω – airo – the first two letters pronounced as “I,” or like the letters “ai” in the

word "aisle." The meaning of the verb means "to take up," "to pick up," "to raise." Here again is the concept of "completed action." It is not an option if one is to be a follower of Jesus, and live the Christian life. It is a requirement. It is Jesus' simply stated command. Jesus added a very important commandment.

3. A DETERMINATION RELATED IMMEDIATELY TO A DEMAND AND A DEDICATION.

"...he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."

Yesterday's decision and dedication must be preserved, and the only way for this to happen is an unrelenting determination that is to be made daily ... every day ... every day ... every day! To get across the idea of "daily," Jesus used what we refer to as an idiom. It is actually two words: καθ' ἡμέραν - kath' hameran, a preposition followed by a noun. The preposition is generally used to indicate a downward motion. When it is used with a "time-related word," such as the noun "day," as it is here in Luke 9:23, it is used in a distributive sense, expressing the concept of "every day."

The word for "follow" is ἀκολουθεῖτω - akoloutheito, a 3rd person singular, present tense - (ongoing, continuous action), imperative mood - (required, demanded). The verb is from the primary verb ἀκολουθέω - akoloutheo. This verb means "to follow," "to go along," "to go or come behind," "to accompany" someone. And in this exciting passage, the Lord Jesus Christ IS that someone!

I trust you caught the significance of this teaching Devotional. The verbs for "deny" and "take up" are in the tense that indicates completed action, but the verb for "follow" is in the tense that focuses on ongoing, continuous action. Yes!

It is exceedingly important that we recognize that these verbs, deny, take up, and follow" are each in the imperative mood. Jesus did not make them optional. The only "optional" idea is before we get to them ... the decision to come to Jesus, follow Him in obedience is optional. But if we choose to follow Him, the imperatives stand before us as non-negotiable. "Deny" or "engage in rigorous abstention from self-indulgence, if involvement in any desires are contrary to the plain, clear teaching of the Word of God." "Take up," "grasp hold of" the rigorous demands of obedience to the Biblical standards of holy living. To declare that one is a Christian, these are the non-negotiables! But they are followed by "daily and continually maintaining a life-style consistent with the Word of God." This is what it means to walk with Jesus Christ.

In 1935 Howard L. Brown and Margaret W. Brown wrote the lyrics, and Howard created the music for a song that is not sung very often in our churches in these days. Here it is! Sing it!

FOLLOW, I WILL FOLLOW THEE

1. Jesus calls me; I must follow, follow Him today.

When His tender voice is pleading, how can I delay?

2. Jesus calls me; I must follow, follow ev'ry hour.

Know the blessing of His presence, fullness of His pow'r.

3. Jesus calls me; I must follow, follow Him always.

When my Savior goes before me, I can never stray.

CHORUS (following each verse)

Follow, I will follow Thee, my Lord, follow ev'ry passing day.

My tomorrows are all known to Thee; Thou wilt lead me all the way.