

Pastor Jeremy M. Thomas
Fredericksburg Bible Church
107 East Austin
Fredericksburg, Texas 78624
830-997-8834 jthomas@fbgbible.org

C0541 – 10/26/2005 – The Terms of Salvation
Lordship Salvation–Part 3

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I. Discipleship and Salvation

Many people think that the core of the Lordship issue is not Christ's Lordship as a requirement at salvation but the confusion of salvation with discipleship. Thus, many call this movement Discipleship Salvation rather than Lordship Salvation. The question is, "Are we saved by discipleship?" Many evangelicals say "Without a doubt." Reformed theologian John Stott wrote,

"The response of faith always embraces the call of discipleship, the call to show forth the reality of a new life and freedom by following in obedience to Christ. The call to faith and to discipleship are the same and cannot be separated."

Lordship Salvation teacher John MacArthur said of salvation and discipleship,

"...no distinction has done so much to undermine the authority of Jesus' message."

Does this have any effect on how one delivers the gospel message? Of course! One author wrote,

“In our own presentation of Christ’s gospel, therefore, we need to lay a similar stress on the cost of following Christ, and make sinners face it soberly before we urge them to respond to the message of free forgiveness. In common honesty, we must not conceal the fact that free forgiveness in one sense will cost everything.”

It is hard for me to imagine how the gospel can be a free gift when at the same time it “will cost everything”. To bring in the cost of being a disciple *up front* is to destroy the freeness of salvation. Either salvation is free of cost or it costs but it is a flat contradiction to say something free...costs. How can Jesus’ words about discipleship being costly be reconciled with His words about salvation being without cost?

Salvation

“And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.” (Rev 22:17b)

Discipleship

“For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it?” (Luke 14:28)

On the other hand, Charles Ryrie wrote of salvation and discipleship,

“No distinction is more vital to theology, more basic to a correct understanding of the New Testament, or more relevant to every believer’s life and witness.”

It is hard for me to accept that those who teach discipleship-salvation are Evangelical. The word “evangelical” comes from the Greek word *euaggelion* which means “gospel” or “good news”. It used to be a term reserved for those who taught a free salvation, not costly. Paul said there is only one *euaggelion* (Gal 1:6ff). Can it now be applied to those who offer a costly salvation? In a postmodern age I guess we can just re-define Evangelical to fit our theology (sarcasm). The surveys of George Barna, James Hunter and others show that “77% of Evangelicals say that mankind is basically good by nature and 87% say that in salvation God helps those who help themselves.”¹ These figures are disturbing to say the least and most likely damnatory. There is no doubt that if these figures are accurate (or even in the ballpark) the gospel is under siege.

A. The Issue Stated

The issue then is whether the call to discipleship is the call to salvation? Both sides agree that discipleship is costly and important. But free grace adherents say no, the call to discipleship follows and is distinct from the call to salvation. Lordship and Reformed adherents say yes, the call to discipleship is the same as and could not be separated from the call to salvation.

What really needs to be evaluated are the words “Follow me” which Jesus uttered on numerous occasions and the word “disciple”.

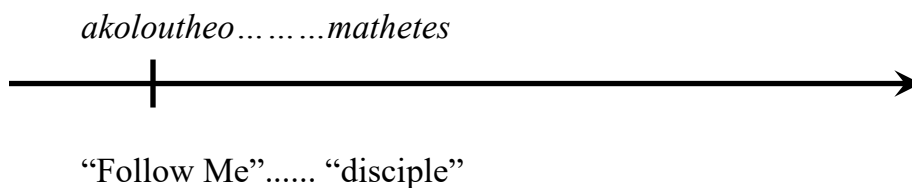
B. The Greek Words

The word “disciple” comes from the Greek word *mathetes*. The word means “a learner, pupil, disciple, follower” and stands opposite to the “teacher” (*didaskalos*). In the ancient Graeco-Roman world the word “disciple” did not carry with it religious overtones. In that day “teachers” would travel around and earn a living by imparting information to their pupils/followers. They may have taught philosophy or rhetoric or religion but one thing is certain, anyone who sat under such teachers did not expect the instruction to be free. The teacher had to eat too and it was his way of earning a living (Hodges). The Pharisees were disciples of Moses (John 9:28), others were disciples of John the Baptist (Matt 9:14;

Acts 19:1-6) (Bing). So, a disciple was simply a pupil who paid a teacher to sit at his feet and learn from his instruction and lifestyle.

The second words, “Follow me”, which Jesus uttered on several occasions, comes from the Greek words *akoloutheo*. The word means “to come after, to walk the same road, to go along behind” and it is the word that Jesus used to invite people to be His disciples.

The relationship of these two words is simple. Jesus would call people to “Follow” Him (*akoloutheo*). This was the call to discipleship. If the invitation was accepted by an individual that individual would become His “disciple” (i.e., pupil)



The question is whether the call to “follow” Jesus was the call to salvation.

It should be noted up front that there are examples in the NT of non-believing disciples (John 6:2-3 where multitudes are not distinguished from disciples; also see those who deserted Him in John 6:60-66) as well as genuine believers who dropped out of the school of discipleship, thus our Lord made it very clear that discipleship was costly and a person should weigh the cost before deciding to follow Him and become His disciple (Luke 14:25-35). Sometimes the word “disciple” is used in a broad way to refer to anyone identified with Christ. But later Jesus refined the definition of “disciple” by placing stringent demands on the one who desires to be a “disciple”. Likewise, we may have people who come into our church and are not believers and they may be drawn into the process of discipleship. We should not assume that because someone attends regularly, they are disciples or even believers. One receives eternal life by faith alone and only God knows the heart of an individual.

C. Key Passages

There are three key passages on discipleship in the NT (Matt 10:35ff)

1. Matt 10:1-4; 35ff

Even though the context has moved from the 1st century (vv. 1-15) to the eschatological Tribulation (vv. 16ff) it is clear in this context that entrance into the kingdom is free (cf 10:7-8) and discipleship is costly (cf 10:35ff). During the Tribulation many will pay the ultimate cost of discipleship; martyrdom. Even though this passage is the eschatological tribulation the application is for all time. It should be noted that this teaching was given at the end of Jesus' 2nd full year of ministry. Jesus never taught the cost of discipleship during His early ministry. In this context Jesus is speaking solely to His disciples (10:1) who are then called His apostles (10:2-4). This is not their introduction into eternal life; they already believed and received eternal life. Jesus is here laying out the cost of true discipleship to His 12 apostles who already possess eternal life! Since they are already called "disciples" in 10:1 (and Judas, the unbeliever, was present) it is clear that there are different kinds of disciples. I would suggest that just as a teacher increases the demands of his pupils gradually so also if a pupil of Christ is willing and able to advance, his level of commitment must increase in order to keep up with the rigorous demands of Christ's curriculum.

2. **Matt 16:13-27 (= Mark 8:31-37=Luke 9:22-25)**

By this time Christ has moved into His final year of earthly ministry. Again, I might mention that Jesus never taught stringent demands for discipleship during His early ministry. Here we are already in His final year of ministry. What we see here is similar to what was taught earlier in Matt 10. Again, Jesus is only speaking to the twelve (cf 4, 5) who are already called "disciples". This is because they became disciples when they received eternal life through faith in Jesus. But they had not yet moved into costly-discipleship. It should be mentioned here that costly-discipleship could not yet be entered into even by Christ's apostles! How could they be asked to lay down their lives for Him when He had not yet laid down His life for them (cf v 21, 25)? Verse 25 is key!

Matthew 16:25 "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

Of verse 25, Olson says, "They are going to have to give their lives over to the Lord, and that is the only way they will really find a true purpose in life and thus really "find" it. The word translated 'life' is *psuche*, which is never used of the eternal life (*zoe*) which we receive in salvation. The apostles already had eternal life; now they needed to find the meaningful life in the center of God's will...Salvation is not at all an issue; indeed, it is rewards He is speaking about, and salvation is not a reward; it is a free gift..."ⁱⁱ How can Lordship and Reformed teachers claim that an unbeliever must be willing to lose his life

for Christ's sake in order to enjoy the benefits of Christ's death for us? Such a demand is clearly out of tenor with the rest of Scripture.

1 John 4:19 *We love, because* He first loved us.

Ephesians 5:2 walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us,

God always does for us first. He does not ask us to do anything or be willing to do anything before we have already enjoyed what He has done for us.

Lastly, in relation to this passage turn over to the parallel passage of Luke 9:22-25 where we have an additional and crucial comment recorded.

Luke 9:23 And He was saying to *them* all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross *daily* and follow Me.

If this is the call to initial salvation then initial salvation must be a "daily" experience. We would have to get saved daily! Reformed and Lordship commentators most often ignore this word though it is the key word in understanding that the demand for costly discipleship is a daily one and not a once for all act at salvation! If this passage refers to justification then justification is not an initial event at all but a process! If such is the case then justification becomes a piece by piece dispensing of merit day by day as Roman Catholicism teaches. What would happen if a professing Christian did not take up his cross one day? Would that mean that he was just a professor? Has there even been one day when John MacArthur did not take up his cross? If such were the requirement for eternal life, I doubt anyone has ever been or ever will be saved!

3. Luke 14:25-35

The last passage is found in Luke 14:25ff. There is no parallel to this passage. This teaching was given near the end of Christ's ministry. It should be reiterated that none of Christ's costly discipleship passages come early in His ministry. There is no doubt that unbelievers are present (cf 14:25, 35) but the passage is for those who have ears to hear and the only ones who have ears to hear are genuine believers who have the Spirit of God (cf 1 Cor 2:14; Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 29, etc.). This passage has bothered many Christians because of the extreme cost Christ lays down in verse 26. As you can imagine, the demand has been misinterpreted by many. But this demand should not confuse us. This is a Semitic figure of speech. Beare says,

This is the more Semitic manner of speaking—Luke’s words are the literal translation of an Aramaic original; but the verb “hate” does not carry its full sense. It means no more than “love less”...Loyalty to the Master must override even the closest family ties.”

The meaning is that Jesus must be the object of one’s supreme love and devotion if one is to be His disciple (Bing). One must never choose family ties over Christ if he is to be a true disciple of Christ. Yet, to require this of an unbeliever who has had no experience of Christ’s redeeming love is totally uncalled for. Besides, even Jesus said this was for those who have “ears to hear” (cf Matt 13; Rev 2-3).

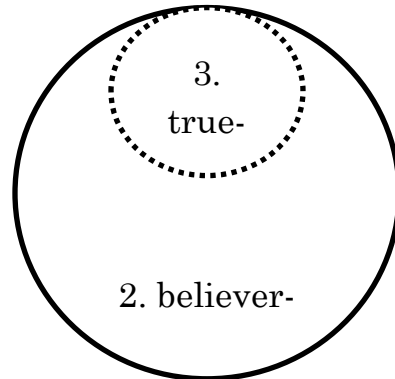
D. A Biblical Model of Discipleship

“Discipleship to Jesus Christ is not an invitation to a Sunday school picnic. It is an invitation to spiritual warfare.” (Hodges, *Absolutely Free!*, 84.)

There is one interesting thing about the word “disciple” I did not mention in the word study; the word “disciple” is not used in the Epistles even once though it is used throughout Acts (last use is Acts 21:6). Perhaps discipleship was only for those who had the ability to sit at the feet of the Master teacher Himself while He was on earth. However, this is highly doubtful. What I see in the NT is three uses of the word “disciple”. First, there were non-believers who were curious about Christ’s teachings and claims. As a result, they followed Him around freely listening to His teaching and watching His lifestyle. Second, there were those who believed and received eternal life. One of the things which freely came with eternal life was the title “disciple”. This is the most common way the word was used. Just as a believer receives every spiritual blessing this does not mean that he enjoys every spiritual blessing. He must appropriate them by faith. Just as a believer has become a citizen of the Kingdom of God does not mean that he is now in the Kingdom of God. There is a difference between positional truth and experiential truth. In the same way, just as a believer becomes a disciple at the moment he receives eternal life this does not mean that he has become a disciple in the true sense of the word. Third, for those who are already believers Christ introduced a cost for the one who was willing to give everything for the cause of Christ. This advanced curriculum of Christ is not easy and one needs to seriously count the cost before making the commitment to become a true disciple. In each passage where Christ lays down the high cost of true discipleship, He closes by mentioning the rewards for finishing His program. Thus, the rewards are very great for the one who counts the cost, makes the payment and

finishes the curriculum. Thus, it seems that the NT distinguishes between three categories of disciples:

- | | |
|---------------------------|--------|
| 1. non-believer-disciples | free |
| 2. believer-disciple | free |
| 3. true-disciple | costly |



1. non-believer-disciple

It would not surprise me one bit if we have non-believer-disciples in our church today. These would be those who are curious in what is taught here and they are watching the lives of Christians here. They may even come for years but this does not make them a genuine believer. One is defined as a genuine believer if and only if they have had faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

I would imagine the great majority of Christians are believer-disciples. There are two basic categories of believer-disciples. *First*, there are those who have little to no interest in Christ. They accepted Christ as Savior but because they were in a church where no teaching was taking place they did not grow and eventually became hardened to the church because of its often carnal ways. *Second*, there are those believer-disciples who are very curious about what is being taught. They show up for church regularly but they have never studied for themselves. They do not take up their cross daily. They may take up their cross Sunday morning and Wednesday night but Christ is just that, interesting. He is not their priority. They are not willing to dedicate themselves to a curriculum of learning which requires intense concentration, dedication, commitment and priority. They have become weighed down with the cares of this world, their job, their wife, their girlfriend, their children, their things and as a result they are not going after Christ. The Bible says these believers, interested in saving their own lives, will actually lose them. They will miss the center of God's will for their lives.

In America today I highly doubt there are many true-disciples of Christ. Few have measured the cost or if measured the cares of this world were too great to give up. Generally speaking, American Christians are far too cozy in their Christianity to even understand what it really takes to be a true-disciple of Christ. The Bible says these people, though genuine believers, are not worthy of Christ.

Luke 14:26-33 "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. ²⁷ "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. ²⁸ "For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? ²⁹ "Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, ³⁰ saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' ³¹ "Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with ten thousand *men* to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? ³² "Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. ³³ "So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions.

These are indeed stringent demands. Are you willing to become a disciple of Christ? Are you willing to place Christ ahead of blood relations? Are you willing to go after Christ with everything? But you must count the cost carefully. No other goal can be allowed to interfere. Indeed, we must be so dedicated to our Lord that our love for Him excels all other loves. By comparison with our devotion to Him, every secondary love must seem like hatred. That is what it will cost to be Christ's pupil. His curriculum is so demanding that it is not possible for you to be His student without 'hating' your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters and, yes, even your very own life" Before you enroll, think about it!" (Hodges, 75-76). How carefully must one count the cost when he wants to build a tower or new home? How embarrassing is it when we start something we can't finish. There is the possibility that those who do not weigh the cost carefully will become school drop-outs. Verse 31 Christ implies that becoming His pupil is like going to war. Moreover, it is like going to war when you are outnumbered. There are going to be a lot of cultural tugs, family, friends, co-workers, politicians, authority figures, etc., that will dissuade you from the task not to mention the spiritual warfare you enter into when you become a true-disciple.

We must remember what Christ said in Matt 16

Matthew 16:25 "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

Spending your time and effort trying to save your own life will only result in forfeiting it. Giving your life over to the Lord is the only way you will find a true purpose in life and the center of God's will.

However, this stipulation cannot and should not ever be placed *up front* in a gospel presentation. "We must in no way make the terms of salvation harder or easier than Christ and the apostles proclaimed them. Otherwise, we fall into the legalism of the Pharisees or the rationalism of the Sadducees. Both extremes were in serious error" (Olson, 286). While I can empathize with MacArthur's concern over the condition of believers today, "It seems to me that MacArthur's cure is worse than the disease. The solution is not to make salvation harder to obtain by adding unbiblical, additional conditions to faith alone, but to emphasize Christ's discipleship demands to professing believers." (Olson, 287)

"At bottom the distinction between salvation and discipleship is clear and important in order to avoid legalism, even if the legalism be promoted under the name of 'grace'."iii

ⁱ C. Gordon Olson, *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism*, p. 255.

ⁱⁱ C. Gordon Olson, *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism*, p. 273.

ⁱⁱⁱ C. Gordon Olson, *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism*, p. 292.

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