

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, March 7, 2012 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

DANGEROUS FOLLOWSHIP

“The Call of the Cross”

Luke 9:23, Romans 12:1-2

THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE UNASHAMED

Author Unknown

I am part of the “Fellowship of the Unashamed.”
The die has been cast. The decision has been made.
I have stepped over the line. I won’t look back, let up, slow down, back away, or be still.
My past is redeemed, my present makes sense, and my future is secure.
I’m finished and done with low living, sight walking, small planning, smooth knees,
Colorless dreams, tamed visions, mundane talking, cheap giving, and dwarfed goals.
I no longer need pre-eminence, position, promotions, or popularity.
I don’t have to be right, first, tops, recognized, praised, regarded, or rewarded.
I now live by faith, lean on his presence, love with patience,
Live by prayer, and labor with power.
My face is set, my gait is fast, my goal is Heaven, my road is narrow
My way is rough, my companions are few, my guide is reliable, and my mission is clear.
I cannot be bought, compromised, detoured, lured away, turned back, deluded, or delayed.
I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice, hesitate in the presence of adversity,
Negotiate at the table of the enemy, ponder at the pool of popularity,
Or meander in the maze of mediocrity. I won’t give up, shut up, let up, or slow up
Until I have stayed up, stored up, prayed up, paid up
And spoken up for the cause of Christ. I am a disciple of Jesus.
I must go till He comes, give till I drop, preach till all know,
And work till He stops me. And when He comes for His own,
He will have no problem recognizing me.
My banner is clear: I am part of the
“Fellowship of the Unashamed.”

- (1) What are your thoughts of the reading, “The Fellowship of the Unashamed”?
- (2) What do you feel “The Fellowship of the Unashamed” is describing?
- (3) Would you say what “The Fellowship of the Unashamed” is describing is dangerous? Why? What is dangerous about it?
- (4) What effects would living “The Fellowship of the Unashamed” have on the church today? Our church? Your personal life? Our community?

I. THE MEANING OF CROSS BEARING (The Definition)

"Then he said to them all: 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.' " (Lk. 9:23-24) The phrase we want to focus on in our study of dangerous followship, that does seem so perilous and threatening is the phrase that appears in verse 23 of Luke 9, *"take up his cross."* *"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross..."* What exactly is it that Jesus is calling the true follow too? What does He mean for us to "take up our cross." The key to understanding this passage is to discern the meaning of "take up his cross." Unfortunately, our understanding of this phrase is clouded by the way the phrase is used in the English language.

1. Misunderstanding of the Phrase, "take up his cross." –

3 Things It Doesn't Mean to Bear One's Cross:

- (1) **It is more than just a burden to put up with** - We use the idea by saying things like, "Well, that is just my cross to bear." What do we mean? A burden or trial one must put up with, as in Alzheimer's is a cross to bear for the whole family, or in a lighter vein, Mowing that huge lawn once a week is Buddy's cross to bear. In our English language the phrase may be used either seriously or lightly. [Second half of 1500s] *The American Heritage® Dictionary of Idioms* by Christine Ammer. Copyright © 2003, 1997 by The Christine Ammer 1992 Trust. Published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. All rights reserved. And it would most commonly refer to putting up with burdens or cares in our life. Life is full of cares and burdens and being a Christian doesn't exempt us from them. Remember that Jesus promised in John 16:33, *"...In this world you will have trouble (burdens, cares, trials). But take heart! I have overcome the world."* And He also reminds us in Matthew 5:45 that, *"... He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."* In other words, burdens, difficulties, trials, troubles, cares come to everyone. We share this in common with all mankind, Christian or un-Christian alike. Most likely in Jesus' discussion on genuine followship He would not be saying it will cost you having to carry the burdens you are already going to carry anyway in this life.
- (2) **It is more than just bearing with other people** – Many feel that their cross to bear in life is other people that may make their life difficult or challenging. It could be a work associate that is particularly hard to put up with, or a spouse or family member that is abusive or struggles with a problem that greatly affects the entire family, or maybe it is just someone that is extremely hard to love that is in your life. Certainly we all have those that we know we are called to love as Christians, but it is particularly hard. In this sense it is true that sometimes bearing with other people may feel like a type of cross we are called to bear in regard to our English use of the phrase. But remember the context of our passage. Jesus is speaking of true discipleship, really following him and the cost of truly following him. In the context it would be a given that a genuine follower would have a love and compassion toward other people. Paul says in Galatians 6:2 that we are to, *"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."* In Ephesians 4:2 Paul says, *"Be completely humble (emptied of self) and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love."* And in Colossians 3:13 he says, *"Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave*

you.” So the idea of cross-bearing having something to do with putting up with those who may be hard to put up with is probably not what Jesus had in mind when he called us to “take up our cross.”

- (3) **It is more than just annoying circumstances** - I searched the Internet for related phrases. I found a classic Greg Allman song for the late 60’s that says, **"I have not come, yeah, to testify about our bad, bad misfortune and I ain't here a wond'rin' why. But I'll live on and I'll be strong 'Cause it just ain't my cross to bear."** The song closes with the lines, **"But in the end, baby, long towards the end of your road, Don't reach out for me, babe, 'cause I'm not gonna carry your load. But I'll live on and I'll be strong 'Cause it just ain't my cross to bear."** Notice that the song equates "my cross" with loads, burdens, and misfortunes... annoying circumstances. This is an extremely common way of understanding "bearing one's cross," but it is not really what Jesus' meant. Not far from Greg Allman's use of the phrase, "my cross to bear." We see the same meaning in the Christian poem "It's Your Cross to Bear" by Barbara Philbrook, "It's your cross to bear and I can't carry the burden for you, as much as I wish that is what I could do." Here it is again: "Bearing the cross is carrying a burden." One of the dictionary definitions of the English noun "cross" is "an affliction that tries one's virtue, steadfastness, or patience."

Observation: *The reason I have spent time on this is because we must steadfastly resist this definition of bearing one's cross if we are to understand Jesus' powerful teaching in this passage. We can't impose our misguided definition into the passage or phrase Jesus uses here if we are to understand it.*

2. Meaning of the Phrase, “take up his cross.” -

Things to Remember About A Cross:

- (1) **A cross is exclusively instrument of torture and death** – A cross was not something that someone was meant to survive. The cross in Jesus' day was an instrument of torture and execution, pure and simple. There wasn't a figurative use of "cross" as a "burden" or "trial" in those days. **Remember: For you and I to take up a cross is not merely to put up with something or someone but to die. Remember Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:31 about himself, “I die daily...”**
- (2) **A cross was a shameful, excruciating and often protracted death** – Our English word “excruciating” come from the Latin words which mean “out of the cross.” Death on the cross was shameful, excruciating, and often protracted. An ancient Greek poem describes it this way, "Punished with limbs outstretched, they see the stake as their fate; they are fastened (and) nailed to it in the most bitter torment, evil food for birds of prey and grim pickings for dogs." From the Third Century BC onwards there is evidence of the use of *crux* as a vulgar taunt among the lower classes, found on the lips of slaves and prostitutes, the English equivalent of which might be "gallows-bird" or "hang-dog." Hengel says that the attitude of people of the ancient world was not casual or a matter of indifference. " It was an utterly offensive affair, 'obscene' in the original sense of the word." **Remember: For you and I to take up a cross will not be easy but shameful, painful and prolonged. Remember Jesus said we are to, “deny self and take up our cross daily.” It is not a pleasant thing we do but a life sacrificing thing we do that is and extremely hard, prolonged dying.**

- (3) **A cross was meant to send a message** - There was no "norm" for execution on the cross, though it often included flogging beforehand, the victim carrying the beam to the place of execution, being nailed to it with outstretched arms, raised up, and seated on a small wooden peg. But Seneca indicates there were many variations: "I see crosses there, not just of one kind but made in many different ways: some have their victims with head down to the ground; some impale their private parts; others stretch out their arms on the gibbet." Listen close to Josephus, an eyewitness of Roman cruelty to the defenders at the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD, gives us a gruesome picture: "... They were first whipped, and then tormented with all sorts of tortures, before they died, and were then crucified before the wall of the city. This miserable procedure made Titus greatly to pity them, while they caught every day five hundred Jews; nay, some days they caught more... The main reason why he did not forbid that cruelty was this, that he hoped the Jews might perhaps yield at that sight, out of fear lest they might themselves afterwards be liable to the same cruel treatment. So the soldiers, out of the wrath and hatred they bore the Jews, nailed those they caught, one after one way, and another after another, to the crosses, by way of jest, when their multitude was so great, that room was wanting for the crosses, and crosses wanting for the bodies." The cross was meant to send a message. **Remember: For you and I to take up a cross is more than an act but a message of our total commitment to Jesus Christ... a willingness to die, to give not something up for Him, but everything up for him.**

Did the cross of Jesus send a message? What was it do you think? What must our "taking up our cross" send as a message?" _____

The passages I have quoted from ancient sources are horrible and repugnant, but I have felt compelled to do so in order that we don't misunderstand Jesus. He isn't talking about a mere burden or trial or difficulty that we must bear. He is talking about death. That is the context of Luke 9:23. Make no mistake, Jesus is not speaking figuratively here, ***"Then He said to them all, 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.'"*** (Lk. 9:23-24)

A definition of "taking up his cross" - death

II. THE MESSAGE OF CROSS BEARING (The Call)

1. THE CLEAR CALL OF THE CROSS

Look at our text again in verse 23, ***"Then he said to them all: 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.*** Notice particularly the words, ***"Then he said to them all..."***

3 things to remember regarding Jesus' call into dangerous followship:

- (1) **Jesus was always clear regarding His call** – As we read Scripture we find the call is clear today as it was 2,000 years ago. The call has not changed. The requirements for followship have not changed. It is important for us to remember that Jesus was reminding them of the cost following him would carry... and it did, as most of them did literally die for their faith.
- (2) **Jesus never recruits followers under false pretenses** – Jesus never promised His followers a life of ease and comfort. He wanted those who would follow Him to clearly understand what they were getting into. The clear call of discipleship... followship is that you will be required to live a life of self-denial and sacrifice.
- (3) **Jesus would not compromise for the sake of popularity** – Jesus made sure everyone understood the requirements for service and He refused to change those requirements. The call of the cross is a clear call.

Respond to the following quote: *“We live in a day of ‘casual Christianity.’ The average church could drop one fourth of its members from the membership roll and neither the church nor the dropped members would notice any difference. Casual Christians are those who want to be numbered among the Flock, but could care less about following the Shepherd. They want the forgiveness the cross of Christ brings but never intend to carry their own cross. They want warm, fuzzy moments on Sunday morning but offer no commitment to Jesus on Monday mornings. In short, they want the crown without the cross.”* – John Hamby, “The Demands of Discipleship” How do you respond to this quote? Do you agree or disagree? Why? Why not? Your thoughts:

2. THE CONDITIONAL CALL OF THE CROSS

Do we ever make following Jesus “conditional”? How? _____

Some conditions we put on following Jesus: *(there are just 5 and certainly not an exhaustive list)*

- (1) **Safety** - I'll follow Jesus “if” it's safe... that is if it isn't going to cost me my reputation, my friends, if God is not going to put my life in harms way in some way.
- (2) **Comfort** - I'll follow Jesus “if” it's comfortable... that is if it doesn't cramp my style, impose too much on what I like to do in life, if I don't have to give too much up, as long as I can maintain my comfortable life style and as long as it doesn't call me out of my comfort zone.

- (3) **Time** – I'll follow Jesus "if" it fits into my schedule... that is if I have time. I'm really busy you know. I'll follow Jesus as long as it doesn't require too much of my time. Listen, if you follow Jesus your time belong to Him.
- (4) **Entertainment** - I'll follow Jesus "if" I can still live my own life my way and still enjoy the things I like to do on my own... that is putting the things that make for our entertainment and enjoyment ahead of Jesus (i.e. hobbies, sports, recreational activities, etc.)
- (5) **Security** – I'll follow Jesus "if" He will promise never to pull the rug out from under me... that is the idea that I am looking to build for myself a secure future here and I don't want to have to give up what makes for my security, house, land, financial investments, future plans.
- (6) **Other** - _____
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Genuine, dangerous followship is a conditional call of the cross. Look again at the verse 23, *"Then he said to them all: 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.'* Notice the word "if." There are those who say the Bible is a book of blessing. I do agree. It is a book of "conditional" blessings. God only responds to obedience. There are conditions [requirements] attached to discipleship. There are many today who call themselves disciples of Jesus, yet they will not accept His cross. They want a crown, but they'll have no cross. But **Luke 14:27** states: *"whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me , CANNOT be my disciple."*

Some conditions Jesus puts on following Jesus:

- (1) **Self-denial** – (see last week's study)
- (2) **Cross-bearing** - One of the main conditions of discipleship is bearing one's cross. Listen my friend, no cross -- no crown. Why, you can't even get to the upper room without going by way of Calvary's cross. The "cross life" is greatly missing in many churches today. The mandate of God is that we are to deny ourselves and take up our cross daily!
- (3) **Faith-following** – (next week's study)

3. THE COSTLY CALL OF THE CROSS

Look at verse 23 again, *"Then he said to them all: 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.'* Christ is seeking those who are willing to abandon all in pursuit of Him. Discipleship is costly. It will cost a man his life. **Dietrich Bonhoeffer** once said, *"When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die!"* Listen, we have made the call of Christ much too easy. Yes, salvation is free but it is not cheap! It cost Christ His precious life! Bonhoeffer speaks of "Cheap grace." Allow me to read a couple paragraphs from his book **The Cost of Discipleship**, *"Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ."* Bonhoeffer contrasts cheap grace with costly grace. He says, "Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field, for the sake of it a man will gladly go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy which the merchant will sell all his goods -- it is the call of Jesus at which the disciple

leaves his nets and follows Him. Such grace is costly because it compels a man to submit to the yoke of Christ and follow Him. It is costly because it costs a man his life. It is costly because it condemns sin. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of His Son. My friend there is a great need to understand the cost of discipleship. This is not the day to offer a "bargain" religion. Preach the word. Make disciples. Inform the Christian of the requirements of discipleship." *What do you think of Boenhoffer's words? Do you agree? Disagree?*

4 things true dangerous followship involves:

- (1) **Servanthood (Matthew 20:25-28)** – "The only way to servanthood is through the Cross: until we have died to self, there is no true servanthood. God does not want our contribution, He wants our surrender to our created purpose." – Dietrich Boenhoffer
- (2) **Stewardship (Matthew 25:15-28)** – Stewardship is based upon the biblical assumption that everything we have and are belongs to God and must be used according to God's will.
- (3) **Sacrifice (1 Corinthians 6:19, Romans 12:1-2)** – We MUST understand that *"we are not our own, for we've been bought with a price."* The Lord has not called us to comfort and ease. We're not called to a life of luxury and great esteem. Jesus clearly taught that the servant was not above his Master. (READ: Romans 12:1-2)
- (4) **Suffering (Philippians 3:10, Galatians 6:17, 2 Corinthians 11:23-30)** – The disciple of Christ may be called upon to suffer for His name. What a wonderful attitude the Apostle Paul displayed when he wrote in *Philippians 3:10, "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death."* He not only desired the joy of resurrection power, but he was willing to share the fellowship of Christ's suffering. He had learned the secret. Remember what I said earlier: "No Cross -- No Crown!"

4. THE CONTINUAL CALL OF THE CROSS

Here it is again in Luke 9:23, *"Then he said to them all: 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."*

3 Realities for Dangerous Followship

- (1) **Followship is a daily walk** – Jesus says if we are to be His disciples, we are to take up our cross DAILY.
- (2) **Followship is a consistent walk** – True discipleship speak of consistency... there is no discharge from this army.
- (3) **Followship is a "in all circumstances" kind of walk** – True discipleship requires carrying your cross when things go well, and when things go wrong. It is required in the good times and the bad times. One thing is certain... the disciple will find a cross waiting for him every day of his life. The cross keeps us firmly planted on the "narrow way." It is an anchor for the soul. It is our compass. It is what makes life meaningful. It is the only way for us to be approved by God.

5. THE CONQUERING CALL OF THE CROSS

Let's return one final time to our text. And he [Jesus] said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. [Luke

9:23] My friend, discipleship means ultimate victory. You see, we are following the One who knows the way to victory. The path may sometimes seem hard. The weight of the cross may sometimes seem too heavy. The splinters from the cross might sometimes wound us. But one thing is certain... as the song says, "The way of the cross leads home." We are certain of victory, because we are closely following the victorious Christ!

III. THE METHOD OF CROSS BEARING (The How To)

3 Step to Cross-Bearing:

Step 1: LAY SOMETHING DOWN - The first aspect of Jesus' teaching is "he must deny himself." The Greek word translated here as "deny" means " 1. 'refuse, disdain,' 3. 'deny, repudiate, disown someone or something,' often speaks of apostasy from the Christian faith... 4. 'deny, disregard oneself'=act in a wholly selfless way." [17] **Christianity is not an add-on to our already full, self-directed way of life.** Discipleship means deliberately choosing to follow another person's way rather than making our own way.

Step 2: PICK SOMETHING UP - The second aspect of Jesus' teaching is to "take up his cross." The Greek word translated here as "take up" literally means, "lift up, take up, pick up," "(lift up and) take or carry (along)." [18] Jesus seems to be saying that just as a condemned man is forced to carry the crossbeam of his own cross, we are to "take up our cross." The exact phrase is used of Simon of Cyrene carrying Jesus' cross to Golgotha (Mark 15:21), after Jesus' had begun to carry it (Greek *bastazo*), but was too weak to finish (John 19:17). Jesus is saying, let the disciples take up the position of a man already condemned to death, carrying the *patibulum* of his cross to the place of execution. Another aspect of Jesus' instruction is to do it "daily." The Greek words here mean literally "daily, every day." [19] This phrase is found only in Luke's Gospel, but the meaning is implied in Matthew and Mark.

Step 3: LIVE SOMETHING OUT - The final aspect of Jesus' saying is to "follow me." The Greek word translated here as "follow" means, "accompany, go along with," with transition to the figurative meaning, "follow" someone as a disciple. [20] This is the common and characteristic word used for the way a disciple is to follow Jesus, and is the central concept of walking along with him wherever he leads. The tense of the verbs is interesting: If anyone would come (present tense, continuous action) after me, he must deny (Aorist, single action in the past) himself and take up (Aorist, single action in the past) his cross daily and follow (present tense, continuous action) me. While the Aorist tense carries the idea of a single, punctiliar action in the past, in this sentence it is combined with the word "daily," so the sense is that the disciple is to deny himself and pick up his cross at the beginning of each day, so that he might succeed in continuing to follow Jesus throughout the day. Interesting!

I want to close with 3 verses/passages from the Apostle Paul. Paul, I believe, understood well what it mean to be a "cross-bearer" daily. Here is some of what he said:

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

Galatians 2:20

"For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God."
Colossians 3:3

"And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour? I die every day..."
1 Corinthians 15:30

It is said of missionaries of the Nineteenth Century, embarking on missions overseas, that they often packed their belongings in a coffin instead of a trunk so they would have something to be buried in. They never expected to return.

***"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself
and take up his cross daily and follow me." -Jesus (Luke 9:23)***