

The Cost of Discipleship – Dr. Charlie Bing

Synopsis:

Eternal salvation is free, but discipleship is costly. The conditions for discipleship are explained.

Discipleship is costly. The Scriptures are clear that to be a disciple in the fullest sense of the term means that a person must pay a price. There is no view of discipleship which would disagree with this conclusion. However, the disagreement comes over whether the conditions for costly discipleship are also conditions for salvation. This critical difference is the subject of this third and last article in my series on discipleship.

I. The Issue

If the conditions of discipleship are also conditions of salvation, then every Christian is, by definition, a disciple, and salvation, by definition, is costly. If these conditions are not conditions for salvation, then the issue of discipleship must be distinguished from the issue of salvation so that discipleship is truly costly and salvation, truly free. We will now survey the two opposing views.

A. The "Costly Grace" View

The view that salvation is costly received its modern impetus from the German theologian and activist Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who expressed his views in the book *The Cost of Discipleship*, first published in English in 1949. He wrote of "costly grace" as opposed to "cheap grace," which he described as "Grace without price; grace without cost," or "grace without discipleship."¹ To him, costly grace is inseparable from discipleship:

The only man who has the right to say that he is justified by grace alone is the man who left all to follow Christ. Such a man knows that the call to discipleship is a gift of grace, and that the call is inseparable from grace.²

Bonhoeffer's concept of "costly grace" has appealed to many who think it is the answer to the apathy and worldliness of contemporary Christians. The proponents of Lordship Salvation have naturally taken interest in costly discipleship as a solution to the growing number of people who profess to be Christians but who do not live up to their profession. Poe states, "The concern for discipleship did not emerge as a theoretical concept in an academic setting, rather it resulted from the phenomenon of people claiming to be Christians who have no interest in the things of Christ."³ Lordship proponents solve this problem by demanding that sinners pay a price for their salvation, the price of submission and obedience. J. I. Packer's statement exemplifies the Lordship position:

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.⁴

In their thinking, the cost of salvation includes the many conditions laid down by Christ for becoming a disciple, since in their opinion, salvation and discipleship are one and the same.⁵

Though Lordship proponents have no reservations about calling salvation costly, they maintain adamantly that salvation is not of works, but a free gift. The "costly but free" contradiction is explained as a theological "paradox."⁶

B. The "Free Grace" View

It is difficult for those who oppose the concept of "costly grace" to understand how its proponents do not teach works salvation, or at the least, how they are not engaging in theological double-talk. Though labeled a position of "cheap grace" by

Lordship Salvation teachers, we prefer to call our position more accurately *Free Grace* because it emphasizes the freeness of salvation and the simplicity of faith.⁷ The Free Grace position holds that salvation and discipleship are separate issues. Salvation concerns the *sinner's* acceptance of the free gift of eternal life and the forgiveness of sins through faith alone. Discipleship concerns the *believer's* response to the grace received by offering himself to God in submission, obedience, and sacrifice. In salvation, Christ paid the price; in discipleship, the believer pays the price. Therefore, salvation is free, but discipleship is costly. Because they are separate issues, there is no contradiction. In the previous articles of this series, we have defended the Free Grace view that discipleship is separate from salvation.⁸ This was done by studying the terms for discipleship in the NT and by showing that the call to *salvation* is not the same as the call to *discipleship*. This article will study the conditions for becoming a disciple in the Gospels and will show that they cannot be conditions for salvation.

II. The Conditions of Discipleship

The teachings of Jesus Christ make it plain that discipleship is costly. The matter to be determined is whether the passages which specify the cost of discipleship speak of the requirements for salvation or of a post-salvation commitment to our Lord. The basic conditions of discipleship were given by Christ after Peter's well-known confession and Christ's prediction of His death and resurrection and the story of His transfiguration. The focus of this section will be largely upon the parallel passages [Matt 16:24-27](#), [Mark 8:34-38](#), and [Luke 9:23-26](#). Other conditions discussed are those found in [Matt 10:37](#)//[Luke 14:26](#); [Luke 14:33](#); and [John 8:30-31](#).

A. The Conditions at Peter's Confession

[Matthew 16:24-27](#), [Mark 8:34-38](#), [Luke 9:23-26](#)

Before the conditions themselves are studied, a consideration of their context will be valuable. The occasion and audience will help determine the purposes of Jesus' hard sayings about discipleship.

1. The Background

The Lordship interpretation of Jesus' teaching about discipleship assumes an evangelistic occasion.⁹ The context shows that the occasion of these sayings is significantly linked to the prediction of Christ's passion and resurrection and His rebuke of Peter. Matthew and Mark's account record Peter's rebuke of Christ and Christ's response: "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men" ([Matt 16:23](#)//[Mark 8:33](#)). Jesus' rebuke demonstrates to the disciples that He must suffer and be killed as part of God's will for Him ([Matt 16:21](#)//[Mark 8:31](#)//[Luke 9:22](#)). There was, for Christ, a price to be paid in following God's will to completion and His own glorification. Peter's rebuke of Christ essentially denies that God's will requires such a price. Jesus' subsequent rebuke categorizes this perspective as satanic. The conditions of discipleship then follow contextually ("Then" [*Tote*], [Matt 16:24](#)) as the price which must be paid to follow the will of God to completion and share in Christ's glory.¹⁰ In view of the Lord's imminent death, departure, and glorification,¹¹ these conditions show the way by which the will of God can be fully realized in Christ's absence.

The audience is also significant. Matthew indicates that Jesus addressed His sayings to none other than the twelve disciples ([Matt 16:24](#)). Mark says that Jesus "called the people (*ochlos*) to Him, with His disciples also" ([Mark 8:34](#)).

The *crowd* is not specifically identified, but in Mark's use of *ochlos*, when there is enough evidence to determine their disposition, the crowd with Jesus is presented as at least curious enough to follow Him. More often, they are characterized as

enthusiastic followers, teachable, exhibiting faith in their midst, and sometimes seeming totally sympathetic to Christ as if they were believers.¹² Luke records that Jesus spoke "to them all" ([Luke 9:23](#)), the nearest antecedent of which is the Twelve ([Luke 9:18](#)),¹³ but possibly He spoke to the Twelve *and* the multitudes.¹⁴ In [Luke 12:1](#) Jesus is described as teaching His disciples "first" in the presence of an "innumerable multitude." It is therefore reasonable to assume that in the Synoptics, when Jesus spoke to the multitudes (who to various degrees were followers), He was first teaching His twelve disciples, and secondarily His other followers.

If Jesus addressed primarily His twelve disciples, who (except for Judas¹⁵) were definitely saved, and the crowds who were at least sympathetic or at most contained many followers whose exact commitment to Christ is left undefined, then it is reasonable to assume these sayings should apply to the issues of a deeper relationship with Him and not to salvation. It would be pointless for the Synoptic authors (especially Matthew) to focus on the disciples if these were conditions of salvation.¹⁶ We would expect such conditions to be announced when the disciples first met Jesus. A brief examination of each of these conditions will demonstrate whether they apply more appropriately to the Christian life or to salvation.

2. The Conditions

The conditions must be interpreted in light of the preceding prediction of Jesus' suffering and death. As it cost Jesus to follow the Father's will, so it would cost His disciples to do the same. As we shall see, sometimes there is agreement about the substance of the condition on the part of Lordship and Free Grace expositors. But the focus of the debate is on whether these are conditions for salvation or for a deeper commitment of discipleship.

Also, it should be noted that the requirements are for anyone who desires to "come after" Christ ([Matt 16:24](#)//[Mark 8:34](#)//[Luke 9:23](#)). As noted in previous articles, "come after" (*opiso elthein*) denotes discipleship. It clearly describes a process, not an event; a committed life of following *after* Jesus rather than coming to (*proselthein*) Him for salvation.¹⁷ The conditions for those who would "come after" Christ will be considered individually, then collectively.

"*Deny himself*" This is best interpreted by what the disciples have just heard about Christ's fate. Jesus was about to submit Himself and His own desires to the desire of the Father for Him, which was suffering and death. To deny oneself refers contextually to being mindful of the things of God, not the things of man ([Matt 16:23](#)//[Mark 8:33](#)). In Stott's understanding, one "must repudiate himself and his right to organize his own life."¹⁸ Gentry argues the significance in relation to salvation: "A person who truly receives Christ as Savior is in effect denying himself and his wants as nothing and Christ as everything."¹⁹

While Stott and Gentry understand the substance of the saying, their application of this condition to salvation does not coincide with the real issue in salvation, which is the forgiveness of sin and justification of the sinner. But in harmony with the context, Jesus is not addressing these issues here. He speaks of denying oneself that which would obstruct the fulfillment of God's will in the course of following Him. In the passages that deal unquestionably with eternal salvation, there is no mention of self-denial, or one's "right to organize his own life," or one's "denying himself his wants" as a requirement for salvation.

"*Take up his cross.*" Stott argues that to take up the cross is to make oneself as a condemned man, apparently in the sense of living for Christ instead of self.²⁰ Boice sees cross-bearing as "saying yes to something for Jesus' sake." Specifically, Boice declares that cross-bearing involves prayer, Bible study, feeding the hungry, giving

drink to the thirsty, receiving strangers, clothing the naked, caring for the sick, visiting prisoners, and witnessing.²¹ In light of the context, it appears that Jesus is expecting the disciples to suffer hardships in order to do God's will just as He does by submitting to the Cross. For Him and for the disciples, it meant they were like men condemned to die, who carry their cross-beams to the place of execution in submission to a higher authority.²² If this is applied to unbelievers, then the Gospel message is a demand to be willing to die for Jesus.

Stott's interpretation and Gentry's practical considerations may be correct, but that they refer to a condition of salvation for unbelievers is untenable, for then salvation would be by suffering, by a willingness to die for Christ, and thus by works, as Boice's particulars demonstrate. This contradicts the Scriptures which speak of the necessity of *Jesus Christ* suffering so that sinners could be saved apart from works.²³ The sinner's willingness to suffer is not a condition of justification. Also, the unbeliever has no cross in the sense of self-mortification (contra Stott), for he is already dead in sins ([Eph. 2:1-2](#)); nor do unbelievers, by definition, have a cross in the sense of Christian duties (contra Boice).

Furthermore, Luke adds the qualifier "daily," which shows this could not refer to salvation because it refers to something that is done repeatedly. Stott is right when he declares, "Every day the Christian is to die. Every day he renounces the sovereignty of his own will. Every day he renews his unconditional surrender to Jesus Christ."²⁴ But Stott speaks here of "the Christian."²⁵ If this characterizes saving faith and is a condition for salvation, as Lordship proponents insist, one must repeatedly place his faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord through daily surrender. In other words, salvation would not occur at a point in time. Such a condition is not found elsewhere in the Bible and makes both salvation and assurance impossible. "*Follow Me.*" As discussed in both previous articles, this phrase speaks of discipleship and denotes the pupil/master relationship. Here Jesus invests the term

with the significance of following Him by obeying God's will, that is, by self-denial and taking up the cross, as Stott agrees.²⁶ Because following another person is a process, a progression, and requires time, this condition cannot speak of entrance into salvation. This would promote salvation by the imitation of Christ or by adherence to His example, which would be a salvation of works. It is best taken as a term that describes a continuously committed lifestyle.

"*Loses his life.*" An explanatory statement ("For") follows the three conditions. Jesus says, "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it" ([Luke 9:24](#); cf. [Matt 16:25](#)//[Mark 8:35](#); and [Matt 10:39](#)). To lose one's life explains in summary form what it means to deny oneself, take up one's cross, and follow Jesus Christ in submission to God's will. The background of Jesus losing His life physically (on the Cross) and thus metaphorically (to the will of God) has been observed in the previous context ([Matt 16:21](#)//[Mark 8:31](#)//[Luke 9:22](#)). Therefore, those who are to be disciples must also lose their lives to the will of God. This will involve the three conditions just mentioned: denial of one's own desires, suffering in obedience, and continuous following of Christ in the will of God.

The denial of one's own desires in order to obey the will of God is amplified by the following rhetorical question: "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" ([Matt 16:26](#); cf. [Mark 8:36](#)// [Luke 9:25](#)). If a man chose *not* to deny himself and *not* to pursue the will of God, but to pursue his own selfish and worldly desires, he would lose his soul (i.e., his life).

Here some point to the phrase "save his life" and "loses his own soul," and the consequence "destroyed" or "lost" (in Luke) to say that the passage speaks of eternal salvation.²⁷ However, the verb *save* (*sozo*) often does not refer to eternal salvation. It is probably used here in the general sense of "rescue, preserve from

danger"²⁸ or "deliver,"²⁹ i.e., save from a life of self-denial and cross-bearing,³⁰ for this thought explains ("For," *gar*) the impact of the previous conditions.

Likewise, "life" (*psyche*) does not automatically refer to the eternal soul only. The parallel in [Luke 9:25](#) replaces Matthew and Mark's "life" with "himself" (*heauton*). The noun *psyche* is frequently used in Scripture in the sense of the essential life of man. Contrary to other Lordship proponents, Stott recognizes this meaning. Speaking of the word *psyche* he correctly observes,

The word for "life" here means neither our physical existence, nor our soul, but our self. The psyche is the ego, the human personality which thinks, feels, plans and chooses... The man who commits himself to Christ, therefore, loses himself, not by the absorption of his personality in Christ's personality but by the submission of his will to Christ's will.³¹

Furthermore, unless the context is clearly proved to be soteriological, the verbs "destroyed" (*apollymi* in Matthew) and "lost" (*zemiōo*, in Matthew and Luke) should retain their respective general meanings of "ruin, destroy, lose"³² and "suffer damage or loss, forfeit, sustain injury."³³ When Jesus says "whoever loses his life for My sake," the sense is certainly not eternal destruction, for He says this one will then "find it," which is something good. Conversely, it fits well that what one may lose when he tries to save his life (preserve himself from the hardships of self-denial and cross-bearing) is life in the essential qualitative sense (i.e., experiencing God's life in this life, [John 17:3](#)), not the eternal soul.

The paradox Jesus used has great meaning. What He appears to be saying is this: "Whoever desires to preserve himself from the hardships of God's will of self-denial and cross-bearing will in fact forfeit the essential quality (= true spiritual value) of the present life he is trying to preserve. On the other hand, whoever forfeits himself to God's will of self-denial and hardships will discover the greater essential quality (spiritual value) of the present life he was willing to forfeit." This

interpretation would therefore not describe eternal salvation, but a higher quality of experience with God in this life, with implications for the eschatological life, as the next section will show.

"*Whoever is ashamed of Me.*" Mark and Luke state a negative condition that if anyone is ashamed of Christ and His words, Christ will also be ashamed of that person at His coming ([Mark 8:38](#)//[Luke 9:26](#)). [Matthew 16:27](#) does not mention shame, but can be correlated with [Matt 10:32-33](#),³⁴ where the condition is stated in terms of confessing and denying Christ,³⁵ and is claimed to be a condition of salvation by Lordship teachers.³⁶

The idea of being ashamed of Christ or denying Christ is clarified in some contexts more than in others. In Luke this saying follows a warning about one who positions himself with the world for the sake of gain ([Luke 9:25](#)). It thus explains ("For," *gar*) the eschatological consequences which face those who desire the world. The same could be said of this saying in [Mark 8:38](#), with the exception that Jesus adds the helpful phrase "in this adulterous and sinful generation." The shame therefore seems to imply a denial of one's identification with Christ in the face of the pressure to live for and identify with the world. In Mark the "For" appears to connect v 38 with v 35, expanding the idea of one's relation to this world and its consequences.

Perhaps the greatest clarification comes from the parallel thought of [Matt 10:32-33](#), where the context is developed more fully. There Jesus is giving instructions to the Twelve before sending them out to preach the Gospel ([Matt 10:5ff.](#)). He warns of rejection and persecution (vv 16-25) and encourages them not to fear (vv 26-31). Verses 32-33 are also followed by similar warnings about rejection (vv 34-36). In vv 32-33 Jesus is both encouraging and warning in the face of the fear of persecution. He wants the disciples to know that anyone who identifies with Him

will be rewarded, while anyone who shrinks from this will be denied by Christ before the Father (explained below). Matthew's context seems a close parallel to that which is signified by Mark's phrase "in this adulterous and sinful generation" ([Mark 8:38](#)).

The consequence facing someone who is ashamed of or denies Christ is more enigmatic. Does Christ's reciprocal shame and denial of that person at His coming denote a denial of salvation? In correlating [Matt 10:32-33](#) with 16:27, it is clear that the issue is some kind of recompense for one's works. Matthew takes care to state that at His coming, Christ "will reward (*apodosei*) each according to his works" (16:27). That Jesus makes works the basis of the recompense demands that salvation not be the issue ([Eph 2:8-9](#)). Also, the verb *apodosei* carries the idea of "recompense" with no inherent sense of whether it is good or bad, so it could speak of positive reward or negative judgment.³⁷ In Mark and Luke a negative recompense is suggested: Those who were too ashamed to identify with Christ will experience Christ's shame. The effect of Christ's shame is not specified, but one could surmise that for a redeemed and now fully-enlightened believer, this would at least produce agonizing regret. In the parallel passage, [Matt 10:32-33](#), the idea of recompense is good (v 32) or bad (v 33) accordingly.³⁸ Christ's confession (or lack of it) in heaven would not relate to the judgment of our salvation, but to an acknowledgment (or lack of it) before the Father of the disciples' unity or fellowship with Christ³⁹ which is recompensed in an unspecified but appropriate way. (However, one might compare [2 Tim 2:12](#), where reigning with Christ is the specific reward.)

3. The Conclusions from These Conditions

Collectively, all the conditions studied thus far in this section are summarized by Lordship advocates as demands for submission to Christ as Lord for salvation. Stott summarizes them under the concept of following Christ:

Thus, in order to follow Christ, we have to deny ourselves, to crucify ourselves, to lose ourselves. The full inexorable demand of Jesus Christ is now laid bare. He does not call us to a sloppy half-heartedness, but to a vigorous, absolute commitment. He invites us to make Him our Lord.⁴⁰

Likewise, MacArthur concludes,

Faith is not an experiment, but a lifelong commitment. It means taking up the cross daily, giving all for Christ each day with no reservations, no uncertainty, no hesitation. It means nothing is knowingly held back, nothing purposely shielded from His lordship, nothing stubbornly kept from His control.⁴¹

Plainly, the conditions understood by Lordship advocates are absolute, all or nothing.⁴² In essence, there is little disagreement with the interpretations of the demands themselves, only with the application of them to salvation instead of the Christian life.

Lordship Salvation teachers will object to the charge that applying these conditions to unbelievers is works oriented. But their interpretation of the conditions cannot evade the charge of salvation by merit. It makes no sense to demand from unbelieving sinners a decision that assumes an understanding of the full significance of Christ's sacrifice, especially at this point in the Gospel narratives before His death. (Would Jesus ask an unbeliever to be willing to die for Him?) This would practically preclude anyone from being saved unless he understood the meanings of these conditions—meanings which can best be appreciated in light of salvation, not in prospect of it.

Jesus' teaching on discipleship took place well into His ministry and was addressed primarily to His disciples as a further revelation of the kind of commitment He desired of His already saved followers. He explained these conditions against the background of His own commitment that would lead to His

death in order to invest them with the fullest significance for those who also desired to follow God's will.

B. Other Conditions

Some other conditions will be considered briefly. Again, the main issue is not usually the interpretation of the condition itself, but whether it applies to Christians or non-Christians.

1. Hate Your Family (Matt 10:37//Luke 14:26)

In another setting, Matthew and Luke add another condition to those already considered. In Matthew's account, Jesus says the one who "loves" family more than Him is "not worthy" of Him. In Luke, Jesus says no one can be His disciple who does not "hate" his family and his own life. This condition is troublesome for many whether it speaks of salvation or of a deeper commitment.

As Beare asserts, Jesus was probably using a Semitic figure of speech:

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", and Matthew has turned this into the positive—not that they must love the immediate family less than Jesus, but they must love Him more. Loyalty to the Master must override even the closest family ties.⁴³

Jesus must be the object of one's supreme love and devotion if one is to be His disciple. But in both Matthew and Luke, the words are applied to believers only. In Matthew, the saying is in the context of a warning about family members who will be divided over Christ (10:34-35). In such a situation, a person who is convinced that Jesus is the Messiah will have his ongoing loyalty tested by those in the family who disagree. This would present a great temptation to choose family ties and

harmony over one's identity with Christ. In Luke, the saying is applied to anyone who "comes to" Jesus, which denotes those who believe in Him, as noted earlier.

Therefore, MacArthur rightly interprets the meaning of the idiom itself, "We must be unquestionably loyal to Him."⁴⁴ However, this interpretation does not apply to the unsaved, for one more naturally learns love and loyalty on the basis of what Jesus has done in redemption and forgiveness. The Bible teaches that God offers salvation to people as sinners, that is, apart from their love and loyalty to Christ ([Rom 5:6-8](#); [I John 4:10](#)). Even thus softened (as a Semitic figure of speech), such a devoted love for God over blood relationships would be an extraordinary demand for sinners who have had no experience of Christ's redeeming love.

Furthermore, it cannot speak of salvation because Matthew records that any loyalty that preempts loyalty to Christ makes or shows one to be "not worthy" of Christ ([Matt 10:37](#)). The statement about unworthiness seems to imply the converse, that one can be worthy of Christ. However, the unsaved are unworthy of Christ and His salvation because they do not believe, not because they are loyal to family ahead of Christ. Conversely, no amount of loyalty to God or any other form of good deed makes a sinner worthy of Christ's righteousness. One can only be worthy for rewards.

Like the previous demands, this demand cannot speak of salvation. It is truth which brings believers into a deeper relationship with Jesus as Lord through their loyalty to Him.

2. Forsake All (Luke 14:33)

Another condition that Jesus gives is that "Whoever does not forsake all... cannot be My disciple." It shares the same context as the condition discussed above ([Luke 14:27](#)) and is therefore addressed to believers. Following the illustrations of a

builder and of a king who did not make the necessary provision to finish their commitments, this condition demands that a believer commit or surrender whatever possessions are necessary in order for him to follow God's will. "All that he has" translates *pasi tois heautou hyparchousin* which speaks of one's property or possessions.⁴⁵

The condition is in absolute terms. Perhaps realizing the difficulty of making this a demand for unbelievers who wish to be saved, Lordship Salvation teachers sometimes soften this and other conditions to a *willingness* to forsake all. MacArthur says,

Do we literally have to give away everything we own to become Christians? No, but we do have to be willing to forsake all ([Luke 14:33](#)), meaning we cling to nothing that takes precedence over Christ (emphasis his).⁴⁶

But Jesus did not say one must only be *willing*. Even if one only had to be willing to do these things for salvation, salvation would be just as conditional and meritorious as if they were actual works. This negates the concept of grace ([Rom 4:4](#)). Furthermore, the subjectivity of willingness makes salvation elusive, as Zuck notes:

Willingness to do something is not the same thing as actually doing it, and it does not answer the question, "How much commitment is necessary?" If lordship proponents do not mean a person must surrender everything to be saved, then why do they say all must be surrendered?⁴⁷

3. Abide in His Word (John 8:30-31)

This passage will be considered because it is usually thought to be a condition of discipleship spoken to unbelievers. Speaking of Jesus' ministry, John writes, "As He spoke these words, many believed in Him. Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, 'If you abide in My word, you are my disciples indeed.'" Many commentators assign Jesus' words to those who had a counterfeit or spurious faith. For example, Morris states,

This section of discourse is addressed to those who believe, and yet do not believe. Clearly they are inclined to think that what Jesus said was true. But they were not prepared to yield Him the far-reaching allegiance that real trust in Him implies.⁴⁸

However, the passage is best understood as a condition of discipleship directed to true believers, as can be shown.

It is argued that "believed Him" in v 31 indicates inadequate faith by the use of *pisteuo* ("believe") without the preposition *eis* ("in"). But it is obvious that those addressed in v 31 are the same as those in v 30 who "believed in Him" (*pisteuo eis auton*), which is a strong term denoting salvation.⁴⁹ Also, there is overwhelming evidence that *pisteuo* without the preposition does not prove that faith is inadequate for salvation.⁵⁰ Salvation is clearly meant in v 24 where *pisteuo* with no preposition is used when Jesus states, "If you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins."

It is also argued that the hostility of these believers continues (vv 33ff.), and Jesus calls them children of the devil (v 44). This continuing hostility reflects the opposition of the Jews, which is a major motif of this section.

In light of what has been argued thus far, vv 31-32 show Jesus briefly directing His attention to those Jews who were saved as He taught in the temple. John's commentary in v 30 is inserted before Jesus' remarks to direct the reader to a change of focus by Christ before the opposition resumes in v 33 as a reaction to Christ's remarks.⁵¹ As soon as He finishes His remarks to these believers, the Jews raise another objection, just as they have been doing from the start of the dialogue (cf. 8:13, 19,22,25). The objection of v 33, being totally out of character with the inclination of those mentioned in vv 31 and 32, shows that the identity of those in v 33 is assumed to be the antagonistic unbelieving Jews, not the new believers.⁵²

This interpretation is most reasonable because it prevents Christ, who says in v 45 "you do not believe Me," from contradicting John, who said they "believed in Him" and "believed Him" (vv 30-31). It also has greater exegetical and theological consistency than that view which would say these are "believers who did not really believe."

The condition for becoming disciples in v 31 should not be construed as an admonition to unbelievers. In fact, the opposite is indicated by the emphatic plural pronoun "you" (*hymeis*) which distinguishes the new believers from the rest of the Jews.⁵³ Also, Jesus' admonition is not to *enter* His word, but to *abide* (*meno*) or continue in it. The assumption that they are already in His word indicates that abiding is a condition for further knowledge of the truth and freedom in Christ. Discipleship, as abiding in intimacy with Christ, is elsewhere in John made conditional on love and obedience (e.g., 13:35; 14:15, 21, 23; 15:4, 7, 10, 14).

III. The Difference Between Discipleship and Salvation

Synthesizing the observations of this and the previous two articles, we find a clear distinction between committed discipleship and salvation. These differences between simple salvation and discipleship cannot be ignored: Salvation is a free gift; intimate discipleship is costly. Salvation relates primarily to Christ as Savior; discipleship relates primarily to Christ as Lord. Salvation involves the will of God in redemption and reconciliation; discipleship involves the whole will of God. Salvation's sole condition is "believe"; discipleship's conditions are abide, obey, love, deny oneself, take up the cross, follow, lose one's life, "hate" one's family, etc. Salvation is a new birth; discipleship is a lifetime of growth. Salvation depends on Christ's work on the Cross for all people; discipleship depends on a believer carrying his or her cross for Christ. Salvation is a response to Christ's death and

resurrection; discipleship is a response to Christ's life. Salvation determines eternal destiny; discipleship determines eternal and temporal rewards. Salvation is obtained by faith; discipleship is obtained by faith through works.

The difference is the same as that between justification and sanctification. These realities are related, but we do not encourage sanctification before justification. Justification is through faith alone; sanctification is through a life of progressive faithful obedience. Justification can take place apart from sanctification, but sanctification cannot take place apart from justification. With justification comes the Spirit and His power to accomplish sanctification.

The sequence of justification before sanctification, salvation before discipleship, or faith before commitment is clearly taught in the Bible. Many verses appeal for commitment on the basis of grace already received (e.g., [Rom 12:1](#); [Eph 4:1](#); [Col2:6](#)). The teaching of [Titus 2:11-12](#) is especially relevant because it explicitly relates grace to the believer's sanctification. This passage shows that commitment and obedience come in retrospective response to grace, not in prospective anticipation of it:

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age.

The grace received in salvation is the basis of further Christian commitment, not vice versa. It is significant that Paul uses a verb to express the idea of training that is different from the idea usually related to discipleship expressed by *matheteuo*. The verb he chooses (*paideuo*, "teach") is rooted in the Greek idea of training a child (*paidion*).⁵⁴ Grace, when received, takes an immature person and trains him toward godliness. This and other NT admonitions to commit one's life to godly principles on the basis of grace received would seem superfluous if such a

commitment was understood and made before salvation. The commitment of discipleship is expected of Christians only.

The difference between discipleship and salvation cannot, therefore, be called a paradox. If salvation could somehow be free but costly, then this might be called a paradox. But this attempt by the Lordship Salvation position to maintain theological orthodoxy (justification by faith alone) while demanding a price from the sinner (costly grace) cannot be biblically justified. [Romans 11:6](#) makes works and grace mutually exclusive, as does [Rom 4:5](#): "Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt" (cf. [Eph 2:8-9](#); [Titus 3:5-7](#)). It may cost to *be* or continue as a Christian, but not to *become* a Christian. To cite biblical examples where the Gospel is presented without cost would be superfluous.

IV. Conclusion

Our examination of the conditions of discipleship given in the Gospels show that they are directed toward challenging believers to live lives of obedience, surrender, sacrifice, and self-denial. There is not the slightest evidence that they are intended for unbelievers. To make them so confuses the freeness of the Gospel and nullifies the grace of God in salvation.

Discipleship is indeed costly, but the cost can only be paid in response to the grace received at salvation. As a believer understands the sacrifice of God for his redemption, he will want to respond to the grace given with a reciprocal commitment. As he learns to also sacrifice, obey, and deny himself, he will become more like the Savior who exemplifies these things.

Salvation is by grace; discipleship is costly. The popularized term "costly grace" does *not* present a paradox, but an *absurdity*. It is as much a misnomer as "cheap grace."

There is only one kind of grace, and by definition it is absolutely free! The only sense in which salvation is costly is in the fact that Jesus Christ paid the supreme price, His life, for the sinner's redemption. Unfortunately, this is not the focus of Lordship teaching, which finds cost in the human conditions for salvation. To the sinner, salvation is absolutely free. If it were costly to him in any sense, then it could no longer be of grace and Christianity would take its place alongside the rest of the world's religions.

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Footnotes:

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1963), 45, 47. Bonhoeffer's view of grace seemed more shaped by his experience than by biblical exegesis. His book, first published in 1937 and in English in 1949, was prompted by the accommodation of the church in Germany to Hitler. He was concerned about those members of the state church who presumed they were going to heaven but gave little or no place to the lordship of Christ in their daily affairs or their political stance.

² *Ibid.*, 55.

³ Harry L. Poe, "Evangelism and Discipleship," in *Evangelism in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Thom. S. Rainer, 133-44 (Wheaton: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1989), 136. It is disturbing that Lordship theology appears to originate more from

pragmatics than from biblical and theological inquiry. Books by Lordship Salvation teachers consistently begin with a statement of the problem of worldly Christians as a justification for a costly Gospel (e.g., James Montgomery Boice, *Christ's Call to Discipleship* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1986], 13; Walter J. Chantry, *Today's Gospel: Authentic or Synthetic?* [Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1970; Reprint, 1985], 13-14; John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988], 16). If the majority of Christians were living committed lives, one wonders if there would be a "problem" with the Gospel message at all.

⁴ J. I Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1961), 73.

⁵ E.g., MacArthur, *The Gospel*, 29-30, 196-98; Boice, *Discipleship*, 13-23; Kenneth L. Gentry, "The Great Option: A Study of the Lordship Controversy," *Baptist Reformation Review* 5 (Spring 1976), 76.

⁶ MacArthur writes, "Eternal life is indeed a free gift ([Romans 6:23](#)). Salvation cannot be earned with good deeds or purchased with money. It has already been bought by Christ, who paid the ransom with his blood. But that does not mean there is no cost in terms of salvation's impact on the sinner's life. This paradox may be difficult but it is nevertheless true: salvation is both free and costly" (MacArthur, *The Gospel*, 140). It is not clear what MacArthur means by "cost in terms of salvation's impact on the sinner's life." Here he seems to be saying that the effect ("impact") of salvation *after* it is received exacts a price of obedience, surrender, etc., from the one who was saved. If this is the case, then the reception of the gift of salvation should still be spoken of as free; it is only subsequent sanctification that is costly. This would not present a paradox at all.

⁷ The term "Free Grace" may seem superfluous to those who believe that grace by definition is a free and undeserved gift. However, the debate has forced the

articulation. It has clarifying value in a controversy where "costly grace" has become the cornerstone term of the opposing Lordship Salvation position. The reader is reminded that the same thing happened in the inerrancy debate so that the term "Word of God" became insufficient in the articulation of the verbal inerrantists' position and so evolved into "inspired Word of God," "inerrant inspired Word of God," and "inerrant verbally inspired Word of God," all of which are redundant or superfluous to one who believes that the Bible is without error!

⁸ Charles C. Bing, "Coming to Terms with Discipleship," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 5 (Spring 1992), 35-49, and "The Making of a Disciple," *JOTGES* 5 (Autumn 1992), 27-43.

⁹ E.g., see MacArthur, *The Gospel*, 30.

¹⁰ See Herman N. Ridderbos, *Matthew*, transl. Ray Tognman, *The Bible Student's Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1987), 312.

¹¹ That the transfiguration occurs immediately after these pronouncements about discipleship in all three accounts reinforces the idea of the completion of God's will which brings glorification. Jesus' glorification looks forward to His consummate glory in the kingdom, achieved through His costly obedience.

¹² For further discussion on the significance of *ochlos*, see Charles C. Bing, *Lordship Salvation: A Biblical Evaluation and Response* (Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1991), 247-48. William L. Lane comments on [Mark 8:34](#): "By calling the crowd Jesus indicates that the conditions for following him are relevant for all believers, and not for the disciples alone." William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 306.

¹³ The parallel conditions of Matthew 10 are stated to the Twelve ([Matt 10:5](#)), while a different passage, [Luke 14:26ff.](#), is addressed to the "great multitudes" who "went with Him" ([Luke 14:25](#)).

¹⁴ Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Luke*. The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1896), 248. The portrayal of the multitudes in general in Luke is very similar to Mark's, although a few times Luke shows Christ's antagonists associated with the term *ochlos* (cf. 3:7 [but see v. 10]; 5:29; 11:14-15; 12:54-56). Interestingly, Luke sometimes shows that there was a large number (*ochlos*) of "disciples" (6:17; 7:11).

¹⁵ [John 2:11](#) confirms that the early disciples had believed in Christ. More contextually relevant, the vicarious confession of Peter, which precedes the pericope under consideration, represents the disciples' faith in Jesus as the messianic Savior and the divine Son of God ([Matt 16:16](#)//[Mark 8:29](#)//[Luke 9:20](#)).

¹⁶ One might argue that it is equally pointless to declare the conditions of discipleship to those already called disciples. However, this ignores the progression of revelation which accompanied and characterized Jesus' ministry. Jesus consistently challenged His followers to a greater commitment to the will of God regardless of their present status. The disciple was always becoming more fully a disciple. This was the thesis of the second article in our series.

¹⁷ See Bing, "Coming to Terms," JOTGES 5,39-40, and "The Making of a Disciple," 5, 39.

¹⁸ John R. W. Stott, "Must Christ Be Lord to Be Savior?—Yes," *Eternity* 10 (September 1959), 18.

¹⁹ Gentry, "The Great Option," *BRR* 5:174.

²⁰ Stott, "Yes," *Eternity* 10, 18.

²¹ Boice, *Discipleship*, 40.

²² Lane, *Mark*, 307-308.

²³ Cf. [Acts 3:18](#); [17:3](#); [26:23](#); [Rom 5:6-10](#); [Col 1:21-22](#); [Heb 13:12](#); [1 Pet I: 18-19](#); [3:18](#).

A Lordship advocate might respond that these demands are not to be done in prospect of salvation, but in retrospect as the necessary proof of salvation and

perseverance. We must then ask why they declare them *conditions* of salvation integral to the Gospel itself and to be preached to unbelievers. We can only assume they mean what they say when they write, for example, "Let me say again unequivocally that Jesus' summons to deny self and follow Him was an invitation to salvation" (MacArthur, *The Gospel*, 196), or, "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" (Packer, *Evangelism*, 73). Clearly, stated like this, works are required for salvation in Lordship theology.

²⁴ John R. W. Stott, *Basic Christianity* (London: InterVarsity Press, 1958), 114. See also, Boice, *Discipleship*, 42; and MacArthur, *The Gospel*, 202.

²⁵ This is inconsistent with his application of this passage to unbelievers and confusing in the context of his discussion about salvation. See *Basic Christianity*, 114, and "Yes," *Eternity* 10, 18.

²⁶ Stott, *Basic Christianity*, 114. Also, I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*. The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Erdmans, 1978), 374.

²⁷ Gentry, "The Great Option," *BRR* 5,75; Boice, *Discipleship*, 38; MacArthur, *The Gospel*, 201-202.

²⁸ So R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1964), 645.

²⁹ See the discussion in Zane C. Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege*, 2nd ed. revised and enlarged (Dallas: Redencion Viva, 1992), 96-101.

³⁰ So M. F. Sadler, *The Gospel According to Mark* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1899), 175; R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Mark's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1964), 350.

³¹ Stott, *Basic Christianity*, 114. See also the NIV translation "self" in [Luke 9:25](#).

³² Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago

Press, 1952), s.v. "apollymi," 94-95. A majority of uses in the NT are clearly not soteriological.

³³ Ibid., s.v. "zemioo," 339. Instances of its use in other passages never speak of eternal destruction. One eschatological use refers to a believer who "suffers loss" yet is "saved" eternally ([1 Cor 3:15](#)).

³⁴ As Stott (*Basic Christianity*, 117) suggests.

³⁵ Matthew's use of *arneomai*, "deny," basically conveys little different meaning from Mark and Luke's use of *epaischynomai*, "be ashamed." See Marshall, *Luke*, 377.

³⁶ Stott, *Basic Christianity*, 117; Boice, *Discipleship*, 117; MacArthur, *The Gospel*, 198-200.

³⁷ *Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. "apodidomi," 89-90. For clear examples of a good reward, see [Matt 6:4](#), [6](#), [18](#).

³⁸ Recompense, and not salvation specifically, seems to be the context for Matthew's mention of confessing Christ in 10:32-33. As discussed, the context warns of persecution and rejection ([Matt. 10:16-31](#); [34-36](#)). In such persecution, those who shrink from confessing Christ will be denied the reward of Christ confessing them before the Father in heaven (10:32-33). Furthermore, the issue of one's worthiness (10:37-39) implies the idea of merit, which implies either reward or lack of reward. Jesus then spoke of rewards for those who were not ashamed of identifying with Him and His disciples (10:40-42; cf. 5:11-12). In vv 41 and 42 Jesus uses the word *misthos*, which in the majority of its NT usages denotes a positive "wage" or "reward" (*A Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. "misthos," 525).

³⁹ For this idea see Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931), 1:83; Alexander Balmain Bruce, "The Synoptic Gospels," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids: Erdmans, 1980), 1:167.

⁴⁰ Stott, *Basic Christianity*, 114.

⁴¹ MacArthur, *The Gospel*, 202.

⁴² It is difficult to reconcile MacArthur's statement that these conditions are "not absolute in the sense that it disallows temporary failures like Peter" (ibid.) with his intentionally absolutist choice of language in the preceding quotation.

⁴³ Francis Wright Beare, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1981), 250. See also, C. F. Evans, *Saint Luke* (London: SCM Press, 1990), 577; William F. Arndt, *Luke*, Concordia Classic Commentary Series (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), 344; D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, Vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 257.

⁴⁴ MacArthur, *The Gospel*, 201. Stott and Boice have similar interpretations (Stott, "Yes," *Eternity* 10, 18; Boice, *Discipleship*, 117).

⁴⁵ *Greek English Lexicon*, s.v. "hyparcho," 845.

⁴⁶ MacArthur, *The Gospel*, 84. MacArthur is commenting on the lesson learned from the example of the rich young ruler ([Matt 19:16-22](#); [Mark 10:17-22](#); [Luke 18:18-23](#)), which he believes is summarized by [Luke 14:33](#) (p. 78). This story is preeminently used by Lordship teachers to argue that salvation is costly. E.g., MacArthur, *The Gospel*, 77ff.; Gentry, "The Great Option," *BRR* 5:61,75; Arens J. ten Pas, *The Lordship of Christ* (n.p.: Ross House Books, 1978), 5; Elmer R. Enlow, "Eternal Life: On What Conditions?," *Alliance Witness* (January 19, 1972), 4; Paul Fromer, "The Real Issue in Evangelism," *His* 18 (June 1958), 5; Homer A. Kent, "Review Article: *The Gospel According to Jesus*," *Grace Theological Journal* 10 (1989), 71; J. Wallis, "Many to Belief, But Few to Obedience" *Sojourners* (March 1976), 21-22; Poe, "Evangelism and Discipleship," *Evangelism*, 138. Chantry structures his whole Lordship presentation around the rich young ruler in his book, *Today's Gospel: Authentic or Synthetic?* I believe that the demand Jesus made

of the rich young ruler was not a condition of eternal life. However, the argument deserves more space than this article can afford. Given its prolific use, the pericope would best be treated as the subject of a future article.

⁴⁷ Roy B. Zuck, "Cheap Grace?," *Kindred Spirit* 13 (Summer 1989): 6-7.

⁴⁸ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Erdmans, 1971), 454. Nearly all commentators who argue for a spurious faith in 2:23-24 will also argue for it here.

⁴⁹ Gentry agrees this is a strong term for salvation (Gentry, "The Great Option," *BRR* 5:56).

⁵⁰ Note the absence of the preposition in these soteriological passages: [Matt 9:28](#); [John 5:24](#); [8:24](#); [11:42](#); [13:19](#); [14:10](#); [17:8](#), [21](#); [20:31](#); [Acts 16:34](#); [18:8](#); [Rom 4:3](#); [10:9](#); [Gal 3:6](#); [1 Thess 4:14](#); [2 Tim 1:12](#); [Titus 3:8](#); [1 John 5:1,5, 10](#). That *pisteuo* alone or *pisteuo* with *hoti* ("believe that") can denote salvation as easily as the *pisteuo eis* construction is the conclusion of a number of scholars. See Rudolph Bultmann, s.v. "*pisteuo*," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, transl. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Vol. 6 (1969), 203; Richard Christianson, "The Soteriological Significance of *Pisteuo* in the Gospel of John" (Th.M. thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, 1987), 86-87; Gordon H. Clark, *Faith and Saving Faith* (Jefferson, MO: Trinity Foundation, 1983), 101; Elizabeth Jarvis, "The Key Term 'Believe' in the Gospel of John," *Notes on Translation* 2 (1988), 46-51; Morris, *John*, 337; E. Herbert Nygren, "Faith and Experience," *The Covenant Quarterly* 41 (August 1983), 41-42; M. F. Sadler, *The Gospel According to St. John* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1883), 221; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 2 vols. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 1:561.

⁵¹ This Johannine technique of editorial explanation is further discussed in Hodges, *Gospel Under Siege*, 2nd. ed., 43-44. See also R. C. H. Lenski, *The*

Interpretation of St. John's Gospel (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1943), 627.

⁵² Lenski, John, 628.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 628.

⁵⁴ Dieter Furst, s.v. "*paideuo*," in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, eds. Lothar Coenen, Erick Beyreuther, and Hans Bietenhard, trans. and ed. Cohn Brown, vol. 3 (1981), 775-79. He comments on [Titus 2:11-12](#): 'Here too education is an outworking of grace... what is being said here is that man is justified by grace and led by it into sanctification' (p. 779).