

THE WAY OF THE CROSS

Jesus in no uncertain terms made it clear that a true saving faith commitment to Him involves recognizing Him as number ONE! He told us He came to bring DIVISION and that family would be divided over Him. To love any other more than Jesus is to be unworthy of Him. And then, in this context, He introduced the language of the cross.

Matthew 10:38 (NKJV)

38 And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.

All those listening would have understood the meaning of a cross as representing death. Rome commonly put people to death on a cross in full view for all to see. It was a gruesome, violent, degrading death. There is a death experience in choosing to follow Christ. Death to self and following Christ go together. You can't have one without the other.

And Christ says those who refuse to take up their cross and follow Him are not worthy of Him. They are not fit to be classified as belonging to Him. They have nothing to do with Christ.

As seen in the next verse, Christ was saying that true followers are willing to die for Him if necessary. They choose to follow Christ above all else – including life itself. That is the ultimate commitment. This is what Christ demands from His followers.

“The point is that disciples must be prepared to die (literally and figuratively) as martyrs for Christ.” – **Holman Christian Standard Bible**

“Allegiance even to death is demanded of Christ's followers.”
– **Charles Ryrie**

“Taking up a cross here stands for commitment to the extent of being willing to die for something.” – **Nelson Study Bible**

“The cross was an instrument of death and here symbolizes the necessity of total commitment – even unto death – on the part of Jesus' disciples.” – **NIV Study Bible**

People say, but what about Peter, he denied Jesus 3 times. Yes, he did but look a little closer. Peter adamantly said he was willing to die for Jesus (cf.

Jn. 13:37). Peter's heart was right and he meant it. When they came out to arrest Jesus it was Peter who took the sword and took off the ear of the servant of the high priest (cf. Mt. 26:51). He was sincere. Jesus said to him, "***The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.***" (Mt. 26:41).

The point is Peter did have a weakness lapse, but he was sincerely sold out to Christ and then empowered by the Spirit history records he did in fact die for Jesus in the end. He did as a pattern take up his cross and follow Jesus. This following of Christ does not mean we won't ever mess up, it means that down deep we really do love Jesus above all and that we wrestle with human weakness – which we all do.

Acts 1:8 (NKJV)

8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be **witnesses** [Gk "martus"] to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

"Witness" is from the Greek root word *martus*. *Martus* is the origin of the English word *martyr*. It denotes someone who embodies the example of Jesus by being willing to die for what they believe about Him. This is our calling.

The nature of a saving faith commitment is the same in all dispensations. In Hebrews 11 (the hall of faith chapter) we see example after example of people by faith standing for God in the midst of all manner of hostility and difficult circumstances.

Hebrews 11:24–26 (NKJV)

24 By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter,

25 choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin,

26 esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.

This is the stuff of saving faith as modeled by Moses. The nature of a true saving faith is seen in the Tribulation Period on the part of those who will be willing to die for Christ rather than worship the Antichrist. The nature of saving faith is not different today than it will be then. In all dispensations, the nature of saving faith remains the same.

Revelation 12:11 (NKJV)

11 And they **overcame** him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they **did not love their lives to the death.**

And just to show you that the same principle applies to the Church Age, Christ said this to the Church at Smyrna...

Revelation 2:10 (NKJV)

10 Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. **Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.**

This is a statement of assurance, not a statement of the ground on which one has eternal life. Eternal life is based on the finished work of Christ alone and saving faith in Him. However, if the faith is real, it will show in one's life; and being faithful until death is the ultimate proof of genuine saving faith.

Paul spoke of living the "crucified life" in which he no longer lived for himself.

Galatians 2:20 (NKJV)

20 I have been **crucified with Christ**; it is **no longer I who live**, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh **I live by faith** in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

Faith – the crucified life – and following Christ is all a package! We are saved by faith alone – but it must be the right kind of faith – a faith that follows Christ supremely – not perfectly – but sincerely.