

## Take up your cross

- Jesus used the phrase on four occasions that are recorded (probably more in reality):
  - He who does not take up his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me. (Matthew 10:38, Mark 8:34, in His instructions as He sent out the 12)
  - If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me (Matthew 16:24, to the disciples just after “Get behind Me, Satan”)
  - If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me (Luke 9:23, just after Peter’s “great confession”)
  - Whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple (Luke 14:27, to the multitudes about “counting the cost”)
- All of these are before Jesus was arrested, so our religious image of the crucifixion would not be in the minds of the audience. What image would the word, cross, bring up?
  - Capital punishment was controlled by the Roman government. Their method of execution was by crucifixion. The condemned usually was required to carry his own cross to the place of execution.
    - Important people chose to be executed quickly by their own people or their own hand rather than to be captured and humiliated.
    - Crucifixion was considered humiliating (Hebrews 12:2), which Jesus met with humility (Philippians 2:8).
    - All forms of execution in those days were horribly painful. The only place agony is used refers to Jesus in prayer (Luke 22:44).
  - Following Jesus would not be heroic, but humiliating.
    - A call to arms implies glory.
    - A call to courage implies heroism.
    - A call to dedication implies perseverance.
    - Jesus’ call is a humiliating execution of self.
- In what contexts did Jesus compare discipleship and crucifixion?
  - Being sent out as the advance team for Jesus could be honorable. Jesus pointed out that this tour would more likely be humiliating.
  - Peter refused to accept that Jesus would die soon and badly. Attitude was a great temptation to Jesus, too. But, the objective was to deny self.
  - After Peter announced his conclusion that Jesus is the Christ, Jesus immediately turned the focus from honor to humiliation.
  - In teaching the multitudes, Jesus used crucifixion as part of counting the cost of following.
- Christians will suffer at this level, not at the level of inconvenience.
  - All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution (2 Timothy 3:12)
  - To this you were called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in His steps (1 Peter 2:21)
  - That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death (Philippians 3:10)
  - By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us; we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. (1 John 3:16, see also John 15:13)

## Selflessness

- Ambition
  - Self-willed, selfish ambition
    - 2 Corinthians 12:20 ...lest there be contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambition, backbiting, whisperings, conceits, tumults...
    - Galatians 5:20 [Now the works of the flesh are evident:] ...selfish ambition...
    - Philippians 1:16 – 17 The former preach Christ from selfish ambition...but the latter out of love...
    - Philippians 2:3 – 4 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not for his own interests, but for the interests of others.
    - 2 Timothy 3:2 [in the last days] men will be lovers of themselves...
    - Titus 1:7 For a bishop must be blameless as a steward of God, not self-willed...
    - James 3:14 – 16 But if you have bitter envy and self-interest in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth...For where envy and self-interest exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.
    - 2 Peter 2:10 [to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment,] especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. They are presumptuous and self-willed...
  - Christ-like ambition
    - Philippians 1:16 – 17 (Love is the opposite of selfish ambition. )
    - Philippians 2:3 – 4 (Looking out for the interests of others – love – is the opposite of selfish ambition).
    - 1 Thessalonians 4:11 Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands.
- Giving oneself
  - Illustrations
    - Romans 12:1 – 2 ...present your bodies a living sacrifice...that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God
    - 2 Corinthians 8:5 They first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.
    - Galatians 5:24 Those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.
  - Applications
    - Sacrifice: A celebration of forgiveness with family and friends in the presence of God. Romans 12:1 – 2 connects a Christian life (selflessness, being a celebration of forgiveness) with proving how God wants people to live. The pagan idea of sacrifice is giving up our lives for God. The intended idea is a life of celebration that demonstrates to outsiders what success looks like.
    - Giving the self: This presupposes that the self has been purged of bad motives and is worthy of being a gift.
    - Crucifying the flesh: After listing the works of the flesh and the works of the spirit, Paul summarized that these desires were executed as common criminals. This was to combat the idea of "I'm only human," excusing poor behavior as normal for a child of God.