

Taking Up Our Cross One Day at a Time

Franklin Church of Christ
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Introduction:

"I guess we all have our cross to bear." Have you ever heard that? When is that usually said? Most of the time it is when someone is complaining about some hardship. It could be anywhere from a car problem to a problem with a spouse to a problem at work. This phrase actually comes from the Bible in several passages. However, it is almost never used the way the Bible uses it. Consider **Luke 9:23**.

And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (ESV).

This statement is so much deeper than putting up with trouble in life. It calls to mind the very crucifixion of Jesus Himself. As He carried a cross up Golgotha's hill, until He could no longer physically carry it Himself. Then Simon of Cyrene carried it, following Jesus up that hill. We are to be like Simon, carrying a cross. However, instead of carrying the cross that belongs to someone else, we are carrying our own. However, this verse makes the statement slightly differently than all the other passages that give the same message. This one says we are to take up our own crosses daily. That is, we take up our cross one day at a time. Frankly, I think the only way we will ever walk in a manner worthy of Jesus is if we take this one day at a time point seriously. So, exactly what does it mean to take up our cross daily?

Discussion:

I. Taking up our cross

- A. Taking up our cross does not mean dealing with some hardship. It is not just bearing a burden. To truly grasp what taking up a cross means, look past modern usage and try to imagine what it would have been like to walk down a street in Jerusalem and see a crowd gathering and pressing your way. You can hear the jeering and the howling. You hear Roman soldiers shouting threats at the crowd to clear a path. Then you see someone bloodied and beaten with a large cross pressing on his shoulder. The cross bearing man is stooped over, ready to fall. In fact, he does stumble. This is a picture of taking up a cross.
- B. Now think about that for just a moment. What does that picture mean for this man? Is it merely a burden to bear? Is it merely a trouble to endure? No.
 1. Taking up a cross meant a proclamation of guilt. Granted, Jesus was an exception. But people weren't just crucified every day. This was reserved for the worst of criminals. Taking up a cross declares to the world that I am guilty in the worst ways.
 2. Taking up a cross meant lost of personal control. See **John 21:18**.
 3. Taking up a cross meant certain death. This man was not carrying a mere burden. He was carrying the implement of his own torturous death.
- C. When we hear about taking up a cross, we should hear **Romans 12:1**, which says we should be living sacrifices. We should hear **Galatians 2:20**, which says we have been crucified with Christ and we are no longer in control of our own lives but Jesus is in control. We should hear **Romans 6:1-7**, which says when we were baptized we died to sin and crucified our old self with Christ. We should hear **Ephesians 4:22-32**, which says we have put off our old selves and are being renewed in our mind. We should hear **Colossians 3:3-10**, which says we should put to death what is earthly in us because we have died in Christ.
- D. Do you see what taking up our cross really means? It doesn't mean carrying a burden or enduring a trial. It means recognizing and admitting how guilty we are in our sins. Then it means putting that part of ourselves to death. It means putting away lying, lust, cheating, stealing, clamoring, wrath, resentment, bitterness, holding grudges, drinking, covetousness, slander, malice, gossip, etc. It means dying to all those faults, defects and sins that keep us separated from God. We sometimes act like the little faults we have are no big deal; we're only human. But we are supposed to be taking up our cross, dead to those old selves who give in to the earthly and fleshly passions, not walking our own way but following God's. It is not easy. It is a burden. It is a sacrifice. In fact, at times, when we do not pursue the passions of our body and mind, we may think we might die. Part of us doesn't want to give up these things but figure out some exception for ourselves so we can pursue these passions at least a little. But, we must crucify them. We must take up our cross.

- II. We must take up our cross daily.
- A. Taking up our cross is, in some ways, a hard thing. But, we need to notice the fact that Jesus said we should take up our cross *daily*. We do not take up our cross once and are done with it. We take it up each day. Every morning, as we face a new day, we need to pick up that cross. We renew our commitment to put our old selves to death. Let's face it, as **Romans 6:16** says, we had become enslaved to sin. As **Ephesians 2:3** says, we all became by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind. We are absolutely naïve if we think that such an enslavement is defeated overnight. We are absolutely naïve if we think we can make a momentary decision and suddenly never struggle against our temptations and sins again. Therefore, we have to take up our cross every day.
- B. There are three practical matters this brings to light.
1. On a practical level, this means if we had a great day of cross bearing yesterday, we don't get to think the battle is over. We face every day anew, without resting on the laurels of yesterday. We have to take up our cross again today. We have to put our earthly passions to death again today. We have to commit to purity again today. If we think that we can let our guard down today because we had a great day yesterday, we will fall. As Paul said in **I Corinthians 10:12**, "Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall" (ESV). This is not a one-time event. This is something we have to do every day.
 2. But there is another side to this. Taking up our cross is not a one-time shot, wherein we must get it perfectly the first time or it is over. We may not rest on yesterday's victories, but we do not have to quit because of yesterday's failures either. We are in a war. We will win many battles. Sadly, we will lose some as well. We will be broken, embarrassed and ashamed. We may find it hard to look into the eyes of our fellow saints and soldiers in this battle. We cannot do anything about the failures of our past. But God can. He sent Jesus to die for them. If we foundered yesterday, we can pick up our cross again today because today is all we have in which to take up our cross. John said if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive our sins (**I John 1:9**). Confess them, then pick your cross up again today and do what you can right now.
 3. We do this one day at a time. We do not take up our cross for a lifetime all at once. We do not take up our cross weekly, monthly, annually. We do not take up our cross ten years at a time. No, we take it up daily. We take it up one day at a time. We don't have to be overwhelmed wondering how we can keep this up for the next decade, year, month or even week. We only have to think about today. If we take up our cross today, we have done what Jesus asked of us.
- III. It will still be taking up a cross tomorrow, next week, next month, next year...
- A. If taking up a cross is a daily activity, that means today I'm taking up a cross. Tomorrow, serving Christ will still be taking up a cross. Next week, serving Christ will still be taking up a cross. Next month, serving Christ will still be taking up a cross. Next year, serving Christ will still be taking up a cross. Ten years from now it will still be taking up a cross. There is no day coming in this life, where I can lay down the cross and expect to live a pure life. If I do not put to death my earthly passions every day, they will take over. If I do not get up on that cross and let Jesus run my life every day, Satan will conquer.
- B. Brothers and sisters, we may take up our cross today. We may put to death our earthly passions today. We may put on Christ today. But Satan is not taking a nap. He's in the corner doing push-ups. He is waiting for a more opportune time (cf. **Luke 4:13**). He is still a roaring lion seeking whomever he may devour (**I Peter 5:8**). There is never a time when we will suddenly be fixed and impervious to temptations. They wouldn't be temptations if we were impervious to them, would they?
- C. Don't get me wrong. If we take up our cross daily, put to death our earthly passions daily, put on Christ daily, surrender to His control daily, I fully expect living the Christian life to get easier. But, we just need to come to grips with the fact that if we ever let that guard down, we are merely giving Satan a foothold and he will use it for all its worth. So, don't think Christianity will be like taking up a cross for ten years, but then it will be so easy that we won't have to take up the

cross anymore. Oh no. Every day will be taking up a cross. Remember, however, we only have to do it one day at a time.

- D. So, if you have been living this Christian life for 10, 20 or 30 years and you still find that Satan is able to tempt you and it is like carrying a cross to overcome, don't be surprised. Don't think you have failed. Just pick up your cross again today. Put to death your earthly passions again today. Put Christ on again today. Give Jesus the reigns again today. Fight the battles and let God win the victories again today. You are not failing; you are doing exactly what Jesus has asked you.

IV. The seeming paradox of the cross-bearing life

- A. We have painted what seems like a very bleak existence as a Christian. We have pointed out that taking up our cross means declaring how guilty and enslaved to sin we have been. We have pointed out that taking up a cross means putting to death our wants and desires. We have said that taking up our cross means giving someone else control of our lives. We have said that taking up a cross means picking up the implement of our own death. However, while taking up the cross does mean carrying the implement that means death to our earthly passions and fleshly lusts, it does not mean we are carrying the implement of our death. Rather, we are carrying the implement of our life.
- B. It is a seeming paradox. It seems that we are losing our lives because we are giving up control of our lives. It seems we are actually putting ourselves to death. But as Jesus goes on to say in **Luke 9:24**, "Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it" (ESV). If we fight to hold on to our lives, if we fight to keep our passions and desires alive, we will lose our lives. It is only when we put our passions, lusts, desires, plans, goals, lives to death that we have real life.
- C. Brothers and sisters, it is only when we enslave ourselves to Christ and His righteousness that we can truly be set free to pursue what is real life. That is Paul's point in **Romans 6:15-23**. We can buck against the grain of Christ's cross. We can argue to cut the cross down. We can plead for making the cross lighter, but all we are doing is insuring our own death. True life, eternal life comes by picking up our cross daily, by being crucified with Christ, by being a living sacrifice.
- D. Allow me to assure you, your worst day of cross-bearing will be better than your best day on which you lay down your cross. Because the days you lay your cross down are the days you shackle yourself anew to the ball and chain of sin and enslavement to it.

Conclusion:

What are you taking up today? Are you taking up your cross? Or are you taking up resentment, bitterness, lust, immorality, drunkenness, vengeance, wrath, clamor, covetousness, gossip, malice, slander? Satan wants you to think if you hang on to those sins, if you pass on that gossip, if you stew in your resentment, if you take your vengeance, if you pursue your lust and immorality that you will have life, freedom and happiness. You will not. You will have guilt, shame, bitterness and death. The cross is the only way to real freedom and real life. Take it up today. You can worry about tomorrow when it gets here. How about taking up your cross today, right now?