

CAPITOL STUDIES

MAY 12, 2021 • WEEK 18



SEVEN DEADLY
SINS AND CIVIL
SERVANTS:
SPECIAL TOPICS

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Verse of the Week

Luke 9:62

But Jesus said to him, "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

Faithful Followers of Christ in the Capitol



SUPREME COURT JUSTICE ANTONIN SCALIA was supreme in judgment in the eyes of millions of Americans during his almost 30-year tenure on the United States Supreme Court from 1986-2016. Scalia was a most quotable judge. One of his most striking quotations was this: "God assumed from the beginning that the wise of the world would view Christians as fools... and He has not been disappointed. Devout Christians are destined to be regarded as fools in modern society. We are fools for Christ's sake. We must pray for courage to endure the scorn of the sophisticated world. If I have brought any message today, it is this: Have the courage to have your wisdom regarded as stupidity. Be fools for Christ. And have the courage to suffer the contempt of the sophisticated world."¹

Rev. Perry M. Gauthier, V. D. M.

(This study is adapted from an earlier series by Rev. Gauthier, 1960–2020.)



INTRODUCTION

Are you willing to suffer contempt or even some degree of death for Christian values you voice or ethical judgments you make? As Providence would have it, this week we will see that Luke wrote the government leader Theophilus that Jesus Christ Himself called all Christians in His day to “take up their crosses (death instruments) and follow Him.” Today, Jesus asks all of His followers in Nebraska, out of and inside the Capitol, to follow Him faithfully and if needed, unto death. Jesus said, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow Me.... [W]hoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it” (Luke 9:23-24).

1. COUNT CONTEMPT’S COSTS CAREFULLY!

Christ calls followers to count the cost and decide if putting Him above ALL else, even death, is worth it. Jesus paid men the compliment of pitching His demands so high that they cannot be higher.² At this point in His ministry, Christianity’s perfect Founder has so far been powerfully popular. Yet, as the next few chapters of Luke show, He became increasingly unpopular. Towards the end of his book, Luke depicted Jesus as betrayed, run through a kangaroo court, and beaten nearly to death after a capital mistrial under a corrupt government led by unstable political leaders. Then He was killed. Do you *really* want to follow this Man? He was—as Satan’s temptings tested—a perfect son. He was *the* perfect Son, the Messiah, the Son of Man, and the Son of God. If a perfect son suffers and dies, so too might imperfect ones.

So why all this talk of death in Luke 9? It is only 33% of the way into this Gospel. Jesus foreshadowed His own crucifixion outside of Jerusalem, also telling His followers to take up their crosses. Luke wrote his Gospel in five parts:

1. Chapters 1-3: **Births and Beginnings** (John & Jesus).
2. Chapters 4-9:50: **Jesus’ Popular Years in Galilee.**
3. Chapters 9:51*-19: **Moving on Mission to Jerusalem.**
4. Chapters 19-21: **Mission in the Capital: Jerusalem.**
5. Chapter 22-24: **Death, Resurrection, and Ascension.**

Our passage (Luke 9:57-62) follows the watershed/hinge point of Luke (9:51) where Jesus’ Ascension is already in view. Note this:

Luke 9:51

As the days were approaching for His Ascension, He resolutely set His face like a flint to go to Jerusalem.³

One verse later, while Jesus was passing through their region, the Samaritans rejected Him because of bigotry and race hatred. Only six verses later, Luke will show us three would-be disciples of the resolute Christ who has begun to show His iron will to march to a capital whose religious and political leaders will kill Him. In *this* context of rejection, on a cruel road leading to the city of His death, Jesus engaged three would-be disciples.



Let us now learn timeless principles about the cost of following Christ, not from Levi or Simon the Pharisee, but from three unnamed, potential disciples of Christ.

2. FAITHFUL FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST IN THE CAPITOL COUNT THE COST

Luke 9:57-58

As they were making their way along the road, someone said to Him, "I choose to volunteer to follow as Your disciple anywhere You might go." ⁵⁸But Jesus replied, "The foxes have dens for dwellings; wilderness birds of the air have roosts, but the traveling Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."

The first of three nameless, budding followers volunteered to be a permanent pupil of this very popular, quite quotable, Galilean Rabbi, who was passing through that region for the final time. Like impetuous Peter who would say he was *oh so ready* to die for Christ only to deny him three times, this impulsive roadside disciple was ready but seemed to Jesus *too* ready. His offer seemed good, but was it a bit *too* good? Jesus neither accepted nor rejected his offer, but He did offer a dose of realism for his rashness. Perhaps he thought following such a popular leader would be *a bed of roses* or like a stay in the Ritz Carlton. However, Theophilus would recall that Luke wrote in the infancy narratives in Luke 1-2 that Jesus was born in a stable, cradled in a manger, and taken as a fugitive to Egypt. He was homeless more than once.

AS A TRAVELING PREACHER, JESUS WAS DEPENDENT ON THE HOSPITALITY OF OTHERS; WITHOUT IT, HE WAS HOMELESS.

The German Lutheran scholar Lenski said:

Yet this is not to say that Jesus was a pauper; He did not live in the squalor of poverty; He was no mendicant monk, no ragged and emaciated beggar. His company had a purse and a treasurer who handled enough to give to the poor at times, enough for Judas to steal from, 200 [days' wages] at one time. [The **impulsive roadside disciple** is] like the seed on stony ground that grew quickly but lacked root to withstand the hot sun. He is an idealist, enthusiastic, of sanguine temperament. He is superficial and does not count the cost. He sees the soldiers on parade, the fine uniforms, and the glittering arms, and is eager to join but forgets the exhausting marches, the bloody battles, the graves, perhaps unmarked.⁴

In some regards, ever-popular Jesus was no better off than the wild birds and wildlife of the region (using a fox as one specific example). At least they had the "creature comforts" of regular dens of lodging at night.

Dear Senator: If you would be a faithful follower of Christ in the Capitol, do not impulsively assume it will cost you nothing. It is enough for a student to become like his teacher. Our Teacher and Perfect Leader, the Lord Jesus, enjoyed popularity and adequate finances in His ministry.





However, He faced severe temptation, was ridiculed, slandered, often weary, misunderstood, misquoted, “homeless,” scorned, betrayed, beaten, and then crucified. Are *you, too*, willing to suffer?

3. FAITHFUL FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST IN THE CAPITOL EXTINGUISH ALL EXCUSES

Next, Jesus used the exact same words He used in Luke 5:27 to recruit Levi, the tax franchiser, in trying to recruit a sentimental worldling here:

Luke 9:59-60

And Jesus said to another man, “You must start following Me!” But he objected, “First of all, Lord, I must leave... and bury my father.”⁶⁰ But He said to him, “Let the spiritually dead bury the physically dead among them; but as for you, instead, go and proclaim everywhere the work of God as King.”

Unlike the first, this man did not volunteer. Christ recruited him, calling him to follow. His objection/request seemed like a noble sign of filial affection and parental respect. The burial of the dead was of utmost importance in the dry, hot, sun-scorched Mediterranean but especially among the Jews who did not embalm. They also saw it as a moral corollary to the Fifth Commandment.⁵ Of note is the fact that Jesus said, “*You must follow.*” The man replied, “*First, I must leave (not follow).*” Was there a moral conflict here? Was the man wrong to put his family first?

ONE OF THE PROBLEMS IN LIFE IS THE RELATION OF DUTIES TO EACH OTHER—WHAT SHOULD COME FIRST?

As surely as He read Simon the Pharisee’s mind, Jesus knew He needed to rebuke this man for insincerity. The seemingly harsh rebuke was fitting, for He knew he was using this sacred duty to family as an excuse for his religious sloth. He was trying to postpone his discipleship commitment and ignore God’s convicting call to follow. To tell Jesus you will follow Him after you “first” take care of something pressing is to tell Jesus He is “second” and not as important as the earthly duties God has given you.

Dr. David Stern, a Messianic Jew living in Jerusalem, knew full well this greedy man’s antics and expounded accordingly in his 1992 *Jewish New Testament Commentary*:

Don’t suppose this would-be *talmid* [honorable Bible student] is traveling around with *Yeshua* [Jesus] while his father’s corpse is waiting at home, stinking in the sun. The father is not dead yet! If he had been, the son would have been at home sitting *shiv’ah* [in seven days of mourning]... The son wishes to go home, live in comfort with his father till his death perhaps years hence, collect his inheritance and then at his leisure, become a disciple... Let the spiritually dead, those concerned with the benefits of this world, including inheritances, remain with each other in life and eventually bury their own physically dead.⁶



This man was insincere, faking it with funeral-home duties. Punning with appropriately dark humor, playing on his own words, Jesus rebuked the man: “Let the dead bury the dead!”

When Christ calls men to follow, *He* comes first—before *all* other obligations. This man’s sin was not so much “familyolatry” as it was lying, using a pious smoke screen to cover his lack of conviction, character, and obedience. Might any of *your constituents* excuse away their moral duty to society by ignoring their spiritual obligations before God? Might any of *your colleagues* be postponing their obedience to follow Christ fully in the Capitol? More essentially, how are *you* doing?

4. FAITHFUL FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST IN THE CAPITOL REFUSE A DOUBLE MIND

Luke 9:61-62

Another man also volunteered, “I will follow You, Lord. First though, dispatch me to give farewell to friends and family at home.” ⁶²*Jesus rebuked him, “No new plowman hesitating with his hand on and off the plow’s handle—habitually looking behind him—is a fit follower or worker in God’s kingdom.”*

Our final roadside, would-be follower was a double-minded man, “unstable in all his ways” (James 1:6-8). We may as well call him Mr. Cannot Decide. This disciple of delay was fonder of friends and family *who were not there* than the glorious incarnate Christ *who was there*, 14 feet away. His request, literally for “a detachment” (a military term), would allow him to depart and give details of his deployment and departure to his loved ones. Jesus saw a huge pothole in his road back home to talk to those who may well talk him out of a faithful future. The watchword of the kingdom is FORWARD, not BACKWARDS.

This man was directionally challenged (like Lot’s wife), nostalgically needy, and double-minded—a spiritual staller. Like the second man, out of his mouth came the word “*First...*” He said, “Friends and family come *first*, so take a *second* seat, Rabbi.” Jesus told this Jewish newbie that he was like an apprentice plowman looking to the past and longing for the past. His forward faith was only half at work, and only half-work would result (crooked, shallow furrows). He should follow faithfully the world’s finest traveling Teacher and stop his wanderlust. He had made a joke of himself by attempting to make his plow go in one direction while he kept his eyes in the opposite. Jesus intended the humor here. May we all look single-mindedly forward by faith.

**“I CAN PLOW FORWARD
BY LOOKING BACKWARDS,”
SAID NO PLOWMAN EVER.**



Verse of the Week

Luke 9:62

But Jesus said to him, "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

FOLLOWING FAITHFULLY FROM HERE

Most Honorable Senator: If the quotable Christ had taught today's Senate Study in our agricultural state, He might have left you with these four commands: "Keep your feet moving, keep your eyes forward, keep your hand on the plow, and keep your row straight!"

Sowing spiritual seeds for a future harvest,



Rev. Perry M. Gauthier

FOOTNOTES

1. Quoted in <https://andrewtwalker.com/2016/02/fools-for-christ/>.
2. William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke (The Daily Study Bible)*, First Edition, Westminster Press, 1953, pg. 133.
3. All Scripture quotations are from my own translational paraphrase, based on the *New American Standard Bible 1995 Update*, made carefully, reverently, and respectfully after diligent study work in the original Greek Scriptures.
4. R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel*, Augsburg Publishing House, 1946, pg. 560.
5. Roman Catholics and Lutherans count this as the Fourth Commandment.
6. David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, Jewish New Testament Publications, 1992, pg. 35.



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