



John 12:20-26

(20) Now there were certain Greeks among those who had come up to worship at the feast. (21) And these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee; and they asked him, saying, "Sir, we desire to see Jesus." (22) Philip came and told Andrew, and Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus. (23) But Jesus answered them, saying, "The time has come for the Son of man to be glorified. (24) Truly, truly I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. (25) The one who loves his life shall lose it, and the one who hates his life in this world shall keep it unto eternal life. (26) If anyone will serve Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there shall My servant be also. And if anyone serves Me, him shall the Father honor.

A Faithful Version

This catches the essence of what Christian life and overcoming are all about. Notice the setting here. A small group of Gentiles ask Philip for an audience with [Jesus](#). John does not record one word of what they said, and the context distinctly suggests that Jesus speaks before they ever say a word. He responds to the fact that they want to see Him.

Two thoughts must have exploded into His mind simultaneously. He first recognized that the people who wanted to see Him were Gentiles. He must have envisioned across the expanse of time the huge multitudes of their populations being converted, growing, overcoming, and entering the [Kingdom of God](#).

At the same time, He anticipated their questions. "What must I do to be saved? What must I do to have eternal life? What must I do to be in Your Kingdom?" How does He answer them? He tells them, "You must quit living your life the way you do." He was not, on this occasion, concerned about specific behaviors but rather the overall principle—the force that drives

carnal human life: self-centeredness. So important is what Jesus says that God's voice thunders in agreement out of the heavens:

Then a voice came from heaven, saying, "I have glorified [My name] and will glorify it again." Therefore the people who stood by and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, "An angel has spoken to Him." Jesus answered and said, "This voice did not come because of Me, but for your sake." (verses 28-30)

Notice, beginning in verse 24, how Jesus' response unfolds. He uses a simple, understandable illustration: Unless a seed is planted in the ground and dies, it bears no fruit. Only when its life is sacrificed does it bear any fruit. This applies both to Jesus and to any of His followers. He sacrificed His life, and its fruit until now is the church, but multitudes more will be added as God's plan unfolds.

The same principle holds true in our lives. The fruit that leads to eternal life is produced when the individual sacrifices himself in service to others, [God](#) and man. In verse 25, Jesus teaches that the person who attempts to preserve rather than sacrifice will end up losing what he spent his lifetime attempting to preserve. Meanwhile, those who readily sacrifice their lives keep living right on into the Kingdom of God.

It is interesting to note that John uses two different words, both of which are translated as "life." The first is *psuche*, usually translated "soul," which simply means physical life. The second is *zoe*, and John usually attaches it to the adjective "eternal," causing it to mean the spiritual vitality of God.

In verse 26, He reinforces His instruction regarding sacrifice by commanding us to do as He does. In this case, this is what "follow Me" means. It is not merely walking behind on the same general course but completely "aping" or imitating Him—doing exactly what He is doing. In this particular teaching, it points to the sacrifice of our lives. He was already living this way, and He would complete His life of selfless service by sacrificing it in death. "Greater [love](#) has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" ([John 15: 13](#)). However, we must understand that laying down one's life is a continuous process. He expects us to follow in His steps, do what He does, bear what He bears, love what He loves.

To most of those who call themselves "Christian," Christianity is a theory to be accepted rather than a life to be actively and daily lived out. Many apparently have the vague idea that what Christ does for us and offers to us enables us, while remaining what we are, to evade the consequences of being what we are and to reap a destiny that is not naturally ours. If we believe this, we must seriously consider [II Corinthians 5:10](#): "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." At the end of our lives, we will receive from God what we are living! God wants to see us living like Him, and He will honor those who do.

However, making the sacrifices to live His way is costly to human nature, which resists strongly. Jesus says in [Mark 8:34-38](#):

Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.

Why does Christ have to say things like this? Because human nature is driven by the impulse that the only way to the things a person deeply desires is through self-centered, assertive, competitive concentration on getting what it wants. We all have this drive; however, individuals differ in the strength of human nature in them and the methods they employ to achieve their goals. Jesus says the self must be denied because human nature is driven by pride and [covetousness](#).

Of course, the Bible is not urging us to court martyrdom. It is speaking of a general approach to life, of crucifying the self-centered impulses of human nature. This means subordinating a clamoring ego with its preoccupation with "I," "me," and "mine"; its concern for self-assertion; and its insistence on comfort and prestige. It is denying the self for the sake of embracing

Christ's cause. To be ashamed to live this way of life is equivalent to being ashamed of Christ Himself.

— John W. Ritenbaugh

To learn more, see:

[The Elements of Motivation \(Part Six\): Eternal Life](#)

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