



"What our Lord said about cross-bearing and obedience is not in fine type. It is in bold print on the face of the contract."

—Vance Havner

27-Feb-15

How Expensive Is Your Religion? (Part Three)

Christianity is not for the faint of heart. As we have seen, [Jesus](#) urges us to "count the cost" of discipleship to see if we have what it takes, and many of the patriarchs had to choose between [God](#) and family or other worthwhile yet physical things. If God put such painful choices before them to test their spiritual mettle, He will undoubtedly do the same to us.

As we saw in Part Two, Genesis provides many examples of such choices. For instance, in Genesis 25, three years after the death of Sarah, Abraham married Keturah, whose name means "covered in perfume." Abraham was 137 years old when Sarah died, and they had been married at least 62 years—some think as many as 110 years. He must have been lonely after her death, and even more so after [Isaac](#) and Rebekah moved south. At that point, he still had another 38 years to live.

Verse 2 records that he and Keturah had six sons together and probably several daughters. Then, in verses 3-4, we find that they also had many grandchildren. Her "perfume" must have been wonderful! Yet, in verse 6,

"Abraham gave gifts to the sons of the concubines which Abraham had; and while he was still living he sent them eastward, away from Isaac his son, to the country of the east."

Some speculate that, like Hagar, Keturah was just a concubine among several others. Yet, that scenario seems unlikely. Just as Isaac is the Son of Promise, so Sarah was the Wife of Promise. Scripture lists Keturah as a concubine only to distinguish her from Abraham's primary wife. Notice, however, that he yet again sends family away. Surely, he loved Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah, along with his daughters and grandchildren. Yet he does the hard thing, the expensive thing, and created separation to allow God's plan to proceed. He gave them "gifts"—money or cattle or whatever—enough to set them up in a new place and to give Isaac, the Son of Promise, space.

What about the story of Lot in Genesis 19? God, in His mercy, literally took Lot, his wife, and their two daughters by the hand and pulled them from their evil city. They all left everything behind. Lot's wife is, of course, a prime example of someone "looking back." She felt that she was leaving too much behind. She did not consider that what lay ahead was worth the price.

Jacob had to leave home, and later, he had to flee from his uncle Laban. Isaac and Rebekah, in a manner of speaking, lost their son when Jacob left them. Really, they lost both sons because Esau married three pagan women just to spite them.

His brothers sold Joseph into slavery as part of God's plan. He was separated from his family, taken from the life he had known, and sent to a strange land, yet he kept the [faith](#). He loved God more than father, mother, sister, and brother. Granted, his brothers had thrown him into a pit and then bundled him off as a slave, in chains no doubt, so this was not his choice. But he did not look back. He mourned his losses, but knowing God was working with him, he accepted it and made the sacrifices.

We should not forget the loss that his father, Jacob, suffered, believing he had lost his favorite son to the teeth and claws of beasts. Many more examples like these appear throughout God's Word.

God's people have always been different. Our beliefs—and the conviction of our beliefs—set us apart from family, co-workers, neighbors, etc. It is not easy to swim upstream, against the flow of worldly culture. It is difficult to explain to teachers why we must take our kids out of school to attend a "religious convention," the [Feast of Tabernacles](#) ([Leviticus 23:33-36](#); [John 7: 2-14](#)). It is hard to ask a boss for time off on a holy day. It is uncomfortable not to be on the same page with our families when they gather for [Christmas](#) or [Easter](#). Our kids feel left out when they have no stories to tell at school the day after [Halloween](#).

Recalling similar experiences, having been around the church for over 45 years, I realize that some of them were not the huge obstacles they seemed at the time. They were not as expensive as I feared. Nevertheless, they *were* sacrifices, and they accumulate as God molds us. Each step behind the plow ([Luke 9:62](#)) takes us a little further from our starting point. Losing a summer job at age 16 over the [Sabbath](#) (fired by a Jewish family, no less), while frustrating and difficult at the time, does not reach the level of losing a job when one has a family to support. A child telling a teacher he cannot exchange Christmas gifts with his classmates can be scary, but it prepares him for having to tell his boss something similar later. Each trial builds faith in us, preparing us for the next one.

God has called us out of [the world](#). We are on a different course than most of those around us. Consider the apostle's counsel in [Hebrews 10:35-39](#) (Contemporary English Version):

Keep on being brave! It will bring you great rewards. Learn to be patient, so that you will please God and be given what he has promised. As the Scriptures say,

God is coming soon! It won't be very long.
The people God accepts will live because of their faith.
But he isn't pleased with anyone who turns back.

We are not like those people who turn back and get destroyed. We will keep on having faith until we are saved.

Saved from what, the [second death](#)? Yes. From this evil world? Yes. From not knowing? Yes. The world at large does not know God. They are ignorant of His plan. They are deceived. We do not deserve this knowledge, we do not deserve forgiveness, and we do not deserve the future God lays out for us. Nonetheless, here we are!

If we can keep the plow upright and true and not look back, what are the "great rewards" that await us? What could possibly make this religion as expensive as our very lives? How about seeing our loved ones again, teaching God's way to those ignorant of it, creating and building, laughing and loving, with no [Satan](#) or demons to contend with? In short, everlasting life as a member of the God Family!

[Revelation 21:2](#) (KJV) speaks of the future, when the Holy City, New Jerusalem, descends from heaven, prepared as a bride beautified for her husband: "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (verse 4). Is this not a worthy goal?

How expensive is your religion?

- Mike Ford

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Little Things Count!](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

When we look at ourselves against the backdrop of humanity, we can feel that we do not matter. We are just a number among billions. Yet, no one and no act is truly insignificant because of two natural principles: the natural

tendency is to increase, and we reap what we sow. John Ritenbaugh shows that, concerning sin and righteousness, these principles play major roles in our personal lives and in the Body of Christ.

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