

~Other Speakers S-Z: David Servant:

Not only did Jesus call the unsaved to turn from sin, He also called them to commit themselves to follow and obey immediately. He never offered salvation on lesser terms, as is often done today. He never invited people to "accept" Him, promising them forgiveness, and then later suggested that they might want to commit themselves to obey Him. No, Jesus demanded that the very first step be a step of whole-hearted commitment.

Sadly, Jesus' calls to costly commitment are often simply ignored by professing Christians. Or, if they are acknowledged, are explained away as being calls to a deeper relationship that are supposedly addressed, not to the unsaved, but to those who have already received God's saving grace. Yet so many of these "believers" who claim that Jesus' calls to costly commitment are addressed to them rather than the unsaved do not heed His calls as they interpret them. In their minds, they have the option not to respond in obedience, and they never do.

Let's consider one of Jesus' invitations to salvation that is often interpreted to be a call to a deeper walk, supposedly addressed to those who are already saved:

And He [Jesus] summoned the multitude with His disciples, and said to them, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's shall save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels" (Mark 8:34-38).

Is this an invitation to salvation addressed to unbelievers or an invitation to a more committed relationship addressed to believers? As we read honestly, the answer becomes obvious.

First, notice that the crowd Jesus was speaking to consisted of "the multitude with His disciples" (v. 34, emphasis added). Clearly then, the "multitude" did not consist of His disciples. They, in fact, were "summoned" by Him to hear what He was about to say. Jesus wanted everyone, followers and seekers, to understand the truth He was about to teach. Notice also that He then began by saying, "If anyone" (v. 34, emphasis added). His words apply to anyone and everyone.

As we continue reading, it becomes even clearer who Jesus was addressing. Specifically, His words were directed at every person who desired to (1) "come after" Him, (2) "save his life," (3) not "forfeit his soul," and (4) be among those whom He will not be ashamed of when He "comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels." All four of these expressions indicate Jesus was describing people who desired to be saved. Are we to think that there is a heaven-bound person who does not want to "come after" Jesus and "save his life"? Are we to think that there are true believers who will "forfeit their souls," who are ashamed of Jesus and His words, and of whom Jesus will be ashamed when He returns? Obviously, Jesus was talking about gaining eternal salvation in this passage of Scripture.

Notice that each of the last four sentences in this five-sentence passage all begin with the word "For." Thus each sentence helps to explain and expand upon the previous sentence. No sentence within this passage should be interpreted without considering how the others illuminate it. Let's consider Jesus' words sentence by sentence with that in mind.