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“WORTH THE COST”
First Peter 2:4-8

Is the Jesus Way worth the struggle?

Is obedience to Christ in holiness and αγαπη

[agapē] *love worth the dying to self?*

Is discipleship worth the cost?

- ☐ Please turn with me to First Peter 2:4-8.

Peter’s audience is wrestling with these questions. As Christ Followers they keep colliding head on with the world at nearly every point: for example, money, sex, and power.

☑ {?} **“Money talks.”** {B. Disraeli} **“Money is power.”** {?} **“Money makes the world go round.”** {Euripides} It has even been said, as long ago as 400 B.C., that **“Money is the wise man’s religion.”**

By this standard Christians are fools. The majority are dirt poor. Even the affluent ones do not uphold conventional Greco-Roman material values.

{Mt 19:23; Lk 12:15; Mt 6:19-20} They say nonsensical things like **“It is hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven,”** **“Life does not consist in an abundance of possessions,”** and **“Do not store up... treasures on earth ... store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.”**

Worse yet, Christians damage the economy. They aspire to simplicity and purchase few luxury goods. They give much of their money to the needy and have less to spend in the marketplace. They do not give offerings to

the pagan temples or buy magical amulets and idols like everyone else.

Gospel money ethics are countercultural. They provoke disdain and resentment among the neighbors.

And they are costly. Many believers have less money and fewer possessions because of them.

Is discipleship worth it? Our brothers and sisters in Asia Minor cannot help but wonder.

Might we be wondering, too?

☑ {T. Keller} **“Pagan society [is] stingy with money [but] promiscuous with [the] body.”** {Wilde} **“Everything in [this] world is about sex.”** Pagans idolize sex as the be-all, end-all pinnacle of pleasure that is essential for fully realized humanity; at the same time, they treat it as an animalistic compulsion and saleable commodity.

By this standard Christians are deviants. They strive for chastity outside of marriage and fidelity within it. They delegitimize fornication, homosexuality, prostitution, and adultery.

{Mt 5:28-29a; 1 Co 7:2} They say nonsensical things like **“If your right eye causes you to stumble”** sexually, **“gouge it out and throw it away,”** and **“Each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband.”**

It follows that Jesus People do not attend fertility festivals or visit temple prostitutes. This might anger the deities who control the weather and make crops and livestock fruitful.

Gospel sexual ethics are countercultural. They provoke contempt and anxiety among the neighbors.

They are also strenuous. Self-denial is not easy.

Is discipleship worth it? Our brothers and sisters in Asia Minor cannot help but wonder.

Might we be wondering, too?

{Stendahl} **“Power, after love, is the first source of happiness”** – though many doubt that it comes **“after love.”** Asia Minor worships power: the power of nature, the power of sex, the power of money, the power of Rome. Her people embody Nietzscheism, the philosophy that **“The world...is the will to power!”**

By this standard Christians are weaklings.

They waste time, energy and money on other weaklings who cannot give them any advantage: the sick, the widows, the orphans, the poor. They forego violence and forgive their enemies.

{Mt 20:26-27} They say nonsensical things like **“The rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them... Not so with you ... whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave.”**

Even worse, Christians do not worship Caesar. With few exceptions they refuse to fight in the Roman army. They do not make Rome stronger.

Gospel power ethics are countercultural. They provoke hostility and anger among the neighbors.

And they are risky. Many Christ Followers are singled out to be bullied and abused.

Is discipleship worth it? Our brothers and sisters in Asia Minor cannot help but wonder.

Might we be wondering, too?

{Jobe} Peter knows his readers are **“slandered and maligned,” “their social status, family relationships, and... livelihood [are] threatened,”** and state-sponsored persecution looms on the horizon.

Peter understands the temptation to avoid financial loss, self-denial, social risk and bodily danger. He has already endured these things. Besides, the Risen Lord prophesied that he, the apostle Peter, will himself die as a martyr by crucifixion.

Is the Jesus Way worth the struggle? Is obedience worth the dying to self? Is discipleship worth the cost?

Please turn with me to First Peter 2:4-8.

■ Verses 4-5: **“As you come to him, the living Stone – rejected by human beings but chosen by God and precious to him – you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”**

{1 P 1:20; Php 2:9} The Son of God **“was chosen”** by the Father **“before the creation of the world”**: chosen to be **“Exalted to the highest place and [bear] the name that is above every name.”**

{Is 53:3} And the Son **“was despised and rejected... Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised.”**

“Chosen by God,” “despised and rejected.”

These are not in conflict! The LORD God exalted Jesus precisely because he suffered in obedience.

{Heb 12:2} Did Jesus consider the struggle, the dying to self, the cost to be worth it? Yes, entirely and completely! It was **“for the joy set before him”** that he **“endured the cross, scorning its shame”** and then **“sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”**

{Jn 1:12; 1 P 1:2} This is Good News! If we have **“become children of God”** by receiving the Word made flesh in faith, then we, too, **“have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father”** – chosen to share in Christ’s glory.

{Mt 10:24} But **“Students are not above their teacher, nor servants above their master.”** Jesus suffered in order to be glorified, and so must we.

Let us **“rejoice inasmuch as [we] participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that [we] may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If [we] are insulted because of [his] name ... [we] are blessed, for the Spirit of glory...rests on [us]”** (First Peter 4:13-14).

- Next, First Peter 2:6-8:

For in Scripture it says:

**“See, I lay a stone in Zion,
a chosen and precious cornerstone,
and the one who trusts in him
will never be put to shame.”**

Now to you who believe, this stone is precious.

(This is a popular translation, but nearly every major

commentator refutes it. A more accurate rendering of the Greek is, **“Therefore, the honor is to you who believe”**.) **But to those who do not believe,**

**‘The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone,’**

And,

**“A stone that causes people to stumble
and a rock that makes them fall.”**

**They stumble because they disobey the
message – which is also what they were
destined for.**

Will we devote our lives to building the kingdom of the world, or being built into the kingdom of God?

{Ge 11:4} The kingdom of the world is a **“tower that reaches to the heavens.”** The building blocks are human beings who freely give their souls in exchange for money, sex and power. The structure promises worldly comfort and earthly security, and those who give this project their all **“make a name for”** themselves.

{2 Co 5:1} The kingdom of God is a temple. His children are the **“living stones,”** and **“Whoever wants to be [such a stone] must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow”** the Messiah. They are promised worldly discomfort and earthly insecurity. Most live in obscurity. They give their all to make a name for Jesus.

In some ways the kingdom of the world is the safer bet. It appears to give a better return on the investment.

{Mt 7:24-25} But do not forget what the Son of God has promised: **“Everyone who hears [my] words... and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain [fell], the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall...”**

{1 P 1:6} We **“may have... to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.”** But if we trust in Jesus we **“will not be put to shame”** in the end! It is to our everlasting honor that we obey the Gospel and trust God’s **“chosen and precious cornerstone.”**

{Mt 7:26-27} But those **“who [hear his] words... and [do] not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against [it], and it fell with a great crash.”**

Such people might achieve a high degree of comfort and security in the present. But in the end they will **“fall”!** It is to their everlasting shame that they disobey the Gospel and distrust God’s **“chosen and precious cornerstone.”**

The Jesus Way is often a struggle. Is it worth it? Peter testifies that it is.

Obedience to the Messiah in holiness and *αγαπη* love requires us to die to self. Is it worth it? Peter testifies that it is.

Christian discipleship is costly. Is it worth it? Peter testifies that it is.

First Peter 2:4-8 is the word of the Lord.