

## Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

OLD TESTAMENT – Deuteronomy 30:15-20

### *The Choice of Life and Death*

**15 “See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. 16 If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. 17 But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, 18 I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess. 19 I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, 20 loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.”**

**30:15-18** – Life is full of choices; few carry eternal consequences. But this choice – do we follow our covenant God, or do we go away to follow other gods? – was as important as life itself. Trusting the Lord and living His way isn’t just the only way to stay alive; it’s the only way life can be rich, full, and productive – the way He created it to be. Jesus said, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10). God cannot give us happiness and peace apart from Himself, because apart from Him there is no real happiness and peace. To reject God’s mercy and to seek greater joy and satisfaction somewhere else is the surest way to personal and national ruin. (PBC)

Note from John 10:10 – LIFE AND HAVE IT TO THE FULL – This is the best kind of life: life lived in security and freedom, life with a purpose and goal, life with a capital “L.” – Life is an important word in John (used 36 times; but only 14 times in the Synoptics). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 2)

Justin Martyr says, “God spoke thus to the man first created.” God’s ways with humankind this always remain the same. Daniel would describe how Israel brought down on themselves the curse of death and evil by departing from God’s Law – the whole Word of God (Daniel 9:11). (TLSB)

**30:16** *ways...commandments...rules* – Each suggests a different emphasis. (TLSB)

**30:19** *I call heaven and earth as witnesses.* The typical ancient covenant outside the OT contained a list of gods who served as “witnesses” to its provisions. The covenant in Deuteronomy was “witnessed” by heaven and earth. (CSB)

God informed Israel that His whole creation was summoned to testify that He had told His people in advance what the results of their choice would be: it was a matter of life and death. (TLSB)

*choose life* – Moses could be the Lord’s covenant mediator with Israel. He could urge them to do the right thing, but he couldn’t choose for them. They had to choose for themselves. (PBC)

On the basis that God had chosen them and established a covenant relationship with them based upon grace. Chemnitz: “These statements must not be understood as applying only to the concerns of this life, for in Luke 10:25ff., when the scribe says, ‘What shall I do to gain eternal life?’ Christ replies, ‘What is written in the Law ... this do and you shall live’ ” (*LTh* 2:620). (TLSB)

The most important question you and I will ever have to answer is, “What do you think of Jesus Christ?” Every other question – Where should I live? Whom should I marry? What school should I attend? What career should I pursue? – pales by comparison. There are only two alternatives: “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him” (John 3:36). (PBC)

## EPISTLE – Philemon 1-21

### *Greeting*

**1 Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved fellow worker 2 and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house:3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

**1–2** Although Paul writes together with Timothy and although he addresses the entire church in Colosse, in this very personal letter to Philemon he uses “I” rather than “we,” and “you” (singular except in vv. 22, 25). (CSB)

**1 prisoner.** Paul was under house arrest in Rome when he wrote this Letter. Ac 21–28 describes events that put Paul in prison; clearly, his allegiance to the Gospel led to his arrest. Paul used the time awaiting trial as an opportunity to share the Gospel with people in Rome (Ac 28:30–31). (TLSB)

desmios – Paul calls himself a prisoner rather than apostle. He does so also in Eph. 3:1; 4:1 and 2 Tim 1:8. This might be because he truly is a prisoner of the Roman Empire for his witness of Christ and it also might be an approach of humbleness as he writes Philemon.

Ancient salutations accomplished much more than the typical opening of a modern letter. Complex social relationships were indicated within the few opening words of a salutation, and a tone was established, so that it was immediately clear whether this was to be a letter between equals (“friendship”), a communication between a social superior to an inferior (patron to client), or vice versa. Even the placement of the names was significant. The convention for expressing deference to a social superior, for example, was for the writer to place the receiver’s name in front of his own. (CC)

*Timothy.* Recipient. (CSB)

Several other Christians (e.g., Silas, Barnabas) accompanied Paul at different times in his mission work, but in the latter years of his life Timothy became perhaps his closest colleague. (TLSB)

Timothy joins Paul in greeting Philemon and the other Christians of Philemon’s congregation. Probably that does not indicate that he is a coauthor or separate letter writer. Timothy’s name occurs with Paul’s most frequently in Pauline letter salutations,<sup>f</sup> though in some epistles Sosthenes and Silas are also listed as letter senders parallel to Paul. By joining these other names to his own in the opening salutation, Paul gives testimony to the church that he and his associates all preach and teach the same Gospel. In that respect, Timothy “could hardly have failed to imitate Paul.” (CC)

*Philemon.* A Christian living in Colosse or nearby and the owner of the slave Onesimus. (CSB)

A Christian who lived in Colossae; he owned the slave Onesimus. (TLSB)

Philemon’s name occurs only here in Scripture, so nothing definite about him is known beyond this letter. However, two persons who are associated with Philemon are linked to the Christians in Colossae, and

those links support the view that Philemon was among those Christians who lived in Colossae (though as a moderately wealthy businessman, he may have traveled often). (CC)

*fellow worker.* Philemon supported the Church and its ministries by hosting a local congregation in his home (v 2) and probably in other ways as well. (TLSB)

**2 Apphia.** Probably Philemon's wife. (CSB)

A fellow sister in Christ; probably Philemon's wife, since she is addressed separately from the Church. (TLSB)

*Archippus.* Another colleague in the ministry; possibly Philemon's son. (TLSB)

*church in your house.* NT churches often met in Christian homes (Ac 12:12; 1Co 16:19; Col 4:15). Christian churches today might meet in homes if they are new and small or located in countries where the Church is oppressed and forced underground. (TLSB)

sustratotas – here fellow soldier is taken to mean a brother in the office of the ministry, a fellow pastor.

Paul includes also other members of the Colossian church in his address: And to Apphia, our sister, and Archippus, our fellow-soldier, and the congregation in thy house. Apphia, or Appia, was apparently the wife of Philemon, distinguished also by her interest in the work of the Lord, like other women whose names stand out in the history of the early Church, such as Nary, Tryphena, Tryphosa, Priscilla, Euodia, Syntyche, Lydia. Archippus seems to have occupied an even more important position than Philemon in the congregation, Col. 4, 17, and is therefore believed by many to have been the bishop, or pastor, of the congregation at that time. A fellow-soldier Paul calls him, using the figure of speech which appealed to him very strongly. 2 Cor. 10, 3, 4; 1 Tim. 1, 18; 2 Tim. 2, 3, 4. In a general way. Paul addressed his letter to the entire house-congregation of which Archippus was the head. It is by no means improbable that the entire congregation at Colossae was housed in the inner court of Philemon's dwelling, since this afforded considerable space, if built after the manner of Greek or Roman houses. (Kretzmann)

**3 grace to you and peace from God** – When grace is offered, it will lead to peace.

The greeting is that of most Pauline epistles: Grace to you and peace from God, our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. By the grace of God as it was revealed and manifested in Jesus Christ the right relationship between God and man has been reestablished. The Father having been reconciled to lost and condemned mankind through the blood of His Son, peace between the two contending parties had been established, or rather, the righteous and holy God, for the sake of Christ's merits, has again accepted the children that had left Him in disobedience. Thus to us, as believers, God is our Father; we have been restored to sonship through the vicarious satisfaction of Christ, and we are united in fellowship under the banner of our exalted Lord. Jesus Christ, these two persons of the Godhead being equal in majesty and deity. (Kretzmann)

*our Father.* Paul is reminding Philemon of their common Savior and Judge. (TLSB)

**1–3** Paul begins with a short (compared to his other Letters) and yet personal greeting. His greeting begins and ends with Jesus Christ, the focus of Paul's life. Focus on Jesus should be present in our own friendships and greetings, both with other Christians and with those who do not yet know the Lord. We have opportunities to introduce people to our Lord and Savior. The Lord's grace and peace will strengthen our faith and equip us for all good service. • Lord, I thank You for my friends, and I pray for an opportunity to share Christ with those who have yet to meet You. Amen. (TLSB)

### *Philemon's Love and Faith*

**4 I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, 5 because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints, 6 and I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ. 7 For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you.**

*4 thank ... remember you in my prayers.* Paul set a powerful example in praying for his fellow Christians and the churches. His Letters usually open or close with mention of how he is praying for them. He often gives thanks for their faith and ministry and prays for their strength, spiritual growth, and Gospel witness, thereby setting an example for our prayers. (TLSB)

Some have suggested that the prepositional phrase “in my prayers” (ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν) signified Paul’s *regular* prayers, which he performed in his capacity as an apostle on behalf of his congregations and many charges. (CC)

*5 because I hear of your love...faith you have* – This phrase helps the person(s) know that it not just empty flattery that is being shared. It also gives credit to the Lord for his work.

† Comparing Col 1:4, the NIV has interpreted “your love and your faith, which you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints” (lit.) as an example of the literary device called “chiasm,” in which the thought is structured like the Greek letter *chi* (*x*): Paul often employs “chiasm,” also called “chiasmus”—parallel words or phrases in reverse order—usually symbolized by the formula *a b b a*. An example is in Paul’s frequent phrase: “God [a—name] our Father [b—relationship] and the Lord [b—relationship] Jesus Christ [a—name]” (v. 3; Gal 1:3). A double chiasmus occurs in Gal 2:7–9: “the uncircumcised” (a); “the circumcised” (b); “the circumcised” (b); “the Gentiles” (a); “the Gentiles” (a); “the circumcised” (b). Some examples are in the Greek text but are lost in the English translation, as in Gal 3:3, where the word order in Greek is: “Are you so foolish? After beginning (a) with the Spirit (b), by human effort (b) are you now trying to attain your goal (a)?” (CSB)

The focus of faith is Jesus, and the focus of love is the saints; by structuring the sentence this way, Paul emphasizes how these concepts are inextricably linked. (TLSB)

Paul was perpetually *thankful* (εὐχαριστῶ, a verb in the present tense, v 4a) to God while always “making remembrance” (μνησάν and ποιούμενος, a participle in the present tense, v 4b) of Philemon in his prayers, in as much as he kept “hearing” (ἀκούων, a participle in the present tense, v 5a) about Philemon’s love and faith. The finite verb and participles of verses 4–5 are cast into the present tense and aspect, so that *thanking*, *remembering* in prayer, and *hearing* went on simultaneously together—thus linking up and reinforcing each element, while resonating with the others. (CC)

*saints.* Fellow Christians in the local church and in the ministry at large. (TLSB)

This phrase calls for an explanation of the proper biblical meaning of “saints/holy people” (ἅγιοι). Paul was not thinking here of “special virtuosos of the good life,” but ordinary Christians who have been called by God through the Gospel to faith in Christ, who forgives all their sins, rendering them holy. In Baptism they have been clothed with Christ and Christ’s righteousness.<sup>87</sup> Their status as holy people before God is the result of the imputation of Christ’s own righteousness to them and the plenary forgiveness of their sins, earned by Christ on the cross, which they receive through faith alone. (CC)

**6** *sharing of your faith.* We share our faith by bearing witness, sometimes by words and sometimes by deeds. Paul encourages Philemon to live out or witness to his faith by a special work of mercy. (TLSB)

*sharing.* Gk *koinonia*. (TLSB)

*every good thing.* Effective, living faith bears fruit in appreciating what is good and in good works. (TLSB)

*for the sake of Christ.* God gives us good works to perform so that Christ may be glorified. (TLSB)

**7** *hearts.*† The English equivalent of the Greek for “intestines”—the part of the body that is figurative for the emotions of pity and love (see vv. 12, 20). The Greeks made little distinction between the internal organs above and below the diaphragm. (CSB)

Philemon’s support for the Church and his fellow Christians must have encouraged them, and Paul was pleased to hear about it. Perhaps when Onesimus became a Christian, he had a new appreciation for Philemon’s faith and had told Paul of his activities. (TLSB)

**4–7** Paul gives thanks for his friend Philemon’s love and faith. Apparently, he has heard enough to know that this is real and not for show. We should consider what people see in our lives, and how it might affect them. God can make our life of faith into an effective witness to Christ’s glory. Through the Gospel, He already works effectively in us. • O Lord, I pray that You would use me as Your witness so that I might refresh those around me. Amen. (TLSB)

*Paul’s Plea for Onesimus*

**8** **Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, 9 yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you—I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus— 10 I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus,[b] whose father I became in my imprisonment. 11 (Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me.) 12 I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart. 13 I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel, 14 but I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own accord. 15 For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, 16 no longer as a bondservant[c] but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother—especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. 17 So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me. 18 If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. 19 I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it—to say nothing of your owing me even your own self. 20 Yes, brother, I want some benefit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ. 21 Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say. 22 At the same time, prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping that through your prayers I will be graciously given to you.**

**8** *command.* Paul is gently persuading Philemon to imitate God’s love and grace by freeing the slave Onesimus. Paul had spiritual authority to direct Philemon to do this, but he would like Philemon to learn and live out the lesson rather than merely respond to a command. This may also explain why Paul did not mention his apostolic authority in opening the Letter (cf Ti 1:1). (TLSB)

Paul uses “what is right” (τὸ ἀνῆκον, v 8) as an open-ended expression that points toward the Gospel as the source of all that is good and right for humanity—all that comes by God’s grace, not by force or a command of Law. Paul encourages Philemon to act with the same sort of Christian decorum indicative of right conduct anywhere in the church, regardless of station. (CC)

**9** *old man*. Paul may not have been all that old, but he was probably older than Philemon in years and certainly older in the faith. (TLSB)

*prisoner*. Paul is not asking Philemon for any sacrifice as large as his own imprisonment. (TLSB)

**10** *Onesimus*. His name means useful. (CSB)

One of Philemon’s slaves, who had apparently run away, made his way to Rome, and fallen in with Paul. Paul did not mention Onesimus or how he might have wronged Philemon until after starting to build the case for a pardon based on God’s grace. (TLSB)

The name “Onesimus” is derived from the verb ὀνίνημι, to “profit, benefit, help” (LSJ, I). It can scarcely be a coincidence that the sole NT appearance of that verb is in Philemon 20, where Paul will say, “May I benefit [ὀναίμην] from you in the Lord.” (CC)

*my child*. Paul led Onesimus to faith in Christ, in effect becoming his spiritual father. (TLSB)

**11** *useless ... useful*. A play on the meaning of Onesimus’s name. (CSB)

Before Onesimus rebelled and ran away, he may have pilfered the house or been lazy. (TLSB)

*useful to you*. A wordplay; Onesimus means “useful.” Now that Onesimus is a Christian, Paul expects that he will be able to help with Christian ministry either with Philemon or with Paul. (TLSB)

**12** *sending him back*. If Philemon does not recognize the opportunity to show grace, Onesimus will go back into service as a slave. Regardless, it was wrong to run away, so returning to face punishment strengthens his credibility and witness as a Christian. (TLSB)

*my very heart*. Paul loves Onesimus like a son (cf v 10). (TLSB)

**13** *on your behalf*. Philemon could not be there to support Paul in Rome, but he could allow Onesimus to stay, which would support the ministry. (TLSB)

The proxy service that Onesimus had already rendered for Paul in prison—whatever it was—must have been well-known to Philemon and the others in the original situation. The type of specialized skills Onesimus possessed may to a large extent have determined the type of service Paul had in mind, or perhaps the two letter carriers (Tychicus, Col 4:7; Onesimus, Col 4:9) conveyed to Philemon the sort of oral instruction that has not been preserved in writing. In any event, “Onesimus could not continue to serve Paul ‘on behalf of’ Philemon without Philemon’s explicit approval.” (CC)

*imprisonment for the gospel*. The third mention of Paul’s imprisonment. Philemon should be horrified that the man who led him to faith (v 19) is under arrest because of the Gospel, and by extension he should realize the horror of keeping Onesimus, his new brother in Christ (v 16), in slavery. Paul does not command the elimination of all slavery, but is focused on a personal level. (TLSB)

**14 compulsion.** If Paul does not subject Philemon to compulsion, why should Philemon subject Onesimus to compulsion by keeping him in slavery? Again, Paul is guiding Philemon to do the right thing, but by choice rather than under duress. (TLSB)

Paul hoped that Philemon would react willingly (κατὰ ἐκούσιον, Philemon 14)—and, by extension, cheerfully, ungrudgingly, and wholeheartedly—at possible prospects with Onesimus (even if details of their future together must remain, for us, opaque). The slave had been for Paul a quite unexpected godsend, and the latter’s initial meeting with Onesimus, the slave’s conversion (v 10), and his subsequent “usefulness” to Paul (v 11b) had happened “apart from your [Philemon’s] consent” (v 14). Paul possibly meant Philemon’s legal consent, because γνώμη in some contexts can have that meaning. (CC)

*accord.* Lit, “willingly.” Philemon needs to decide what to do now that Onesimus has returned, bearing this Letter. “Truly good works should be done willingly, or from a voluntary spirit, by those whom God’s Son has made free” (FC SD IV 18). (TLSB)

**15** Paul sees God’s hand in Onesimus’s coming to him to hear the Gospel and notes the eternal consequences (“you might have him back forever”). (TLSB)

Paul’s letter, anticipating Philemon’s every thought, now compels Philemon to reconsider those circumstances that had led to the change in Onesimus. In spite of every appearance to the contrary, Onesimus had not simply run away, suggests St. Paul. Instead, Onesimus had been “separated” (ἐχωρίσθη, v 15) from Philemon—yet only temporarily (πρὸς ὥρον), and according to God’s grand and gracious design. The wording points to God’s providence. (CC)

**16** Paul’s letter, anticipating Philemon’s every thought, now compels Philemon to reconsider those circumstances that had led to the change in Onesimus. In spite of every appearance to the contrary, Onesimus had not simply run away, suggests St. Paul. Instead, Onesimus had been “separated” (ἐχωρίσθη, v 15) from Philemon—yet only temporarily (πρὸς ὥρον), and according to God’s grand and gracious design. The wording points to God’s providence. (TLSB)

In verse 16 Paul establishes the fact that Onesimus may well remain a slave of Philemon “in the flesh” (ἐν σαρκί)—that is, in the sphere of his natural, everyday life (cf. Phil 1:22, 24). And yet Philemon could no longer regard Onesimus as “just a slave” (TEV rendering of ὡς δοῦλον), for now the earthly relationship has been enhanced by a union “in the Lord” (ἐν κυρίῳ), that is, in the realm of the Gospel. The two spheres are complementary, not mutually exclusive. (TLSB)

**17–19** Luther said, “Even as Christ did for us with God the Father, thus Paul also does for Onesimus with Philemon.” (CSB)

**17 your partner.** Paul puts his personal relationship with Philemon on the line in his plea for Onesimus, much as Jesus Christ intercedes for us with God the Father. Cf Php 1:5. (TLSB)

“Receive him [Onesimus] as me” (v 17b). Everything depended on how Philemon would respond to this request put to him by Paul. Probably the welfare and destinies of many Christians hung in the balance. In addition to those whom Paul names—Apphia, Archippus, and the church that met at Philemon’s house (v 2)—Philemon’s response would doubtless have had an impact upon unnamed family members, guests, slaves and freedmen, their dependents, and still other hangers-on, because households in classical society typically consisted of more persons under one roof than in even the largest of modern families. (CC)

**18** Paul offers to make right anything Onesimus stole or damaged when he ran away. (TLSB)

Earlier Paul had tactfully alluded to Onesimus' flight as a momentary separation (ἐχωρίσθη πρὸς ὥραν, "he was separated for a while," v 15). Now Paul no less gently refers to Onesimus' robbery, yet the apostle's reference to that robbery is merely hypothetical: "And if he has wronged you in any way or owes anything, charge this to my account." (CC)

**19** *with my own hand.* Equivalent of signing the promise in v 18. (TLSB)

*to say nothing of your owing me your own self.* If Philemon is not yet persuaded, this should clinch the argument. He learned of God's grace through Paul's ministry. (TLSB)

The point is that Paul promises to pay Onesimus' damages, even as he apparently paid other sums of money occasionally in the course of a quite lengthy ministry. (CC)

**20** *I ... my.* Both pronouns are emphatic, making an obvious allusion to v. 7. (CSB)

*benefit.* The Greek for this word is another play on the name Onesimus. (CSB)

A call for action; Paul expects that Philemon's decision will be good for Onesimus, Philemon, and himself. (TLSB)

*Refresh.* Philemon has been gracious to other Christians (v 7); his decision about Onesimus should continue that gracious behavior. If so, it will encourage and please Paul. (TLSB)

**21** *obedience.* Even though Paul has not commanded Philemon in what to do, he used careful, personal arguments to make clear what God would expect. (TLSB)

## GOSPEL – Luke 14:25-35

### *The Cost of Discipleship*

**25** Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, **26** "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. **27** Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. **28** For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? **29** Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, **30** saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' **31** Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? **32** And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. **33** So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

**14:25** *great crowds* – ὄχλοι πολλοί—Luke provides an echo of 12:1, where the size of the crowds was accented. (CC p. 578)

The crowds stuck close to Jesus everywhere He traveled. (TLSB)

Although Jesus may not be popular with the Pharisees and lawyers, he still draws large crowds. This crowd is journeying with him to Jerusalem. Luke's travel narrative takes another turn with Jesus teaching in parables that are unique to Luke's gospel. There seems to be a large block of teaching from 14:25 to



17:10, which means that the parables of Luke 15–16 that center in God’s mercy and compassion may be part of one extended discourse, which begins with 14:25–35. (CC p. 579)

*accompanied him* – συνεπορεύοντο δὲ αὐτῷ—Luke uses his journey vocabulary (συνεπορεύοντο) to remind the hearer that Jesus is still journeying to Jerusalem. This is the only indication until 17:11 of Jesus’ ongoing journey. On συνεπορεύομαι, see 7:11; 24:15. (CC p. 578)

*turned and said to them* – Are the crowds who go along to inherit the same destiny as Jesus? In this passage, Jesus says *yes!* To be invited to the final, eschatological banquet has its consequences; to repent and receive the gift of the kingdom means to be baptized into Jesus’ death. Lest the crowds look down on the Pharisees and lawyers as unwilling to count the cost, Jesus warns these crowds that to follow him entails great sacrifice. In fact there are three entailments of discipleship announced in this pericope: hating family (14:26), carrying the cross (14:27), and leaving possessions behind (14:33). The point is illustrated with three parables (14:28–30, 31–32, 34–35), the last of which raises the distinction between the hypocritical and the genuine. (CC pp. 579–580)

Since the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, he has engaged in continual catechesis of the Twelve, the seventy (-two), and the crowds. As was clear in the Sermon on the Plain, not all disciples are called to be apostles, but all disciples are learners, students, catechumens. The same meaning for “disciple” obtains here. Much of what Jesus tells the crowds here is catechetical material they have heard before. He has already spoken of hating family (8:19–21; 9:59–62; 12:52–53), carrying a cross (9:23–27), and giving up possessions (5:11, 28; 12:33). But perhaps the loudest echo comes from the discourse in Luke 8 on the parable of the sower (8:4–8), the meaning of parables (8:9–10), the interpretation of the parable of the sower (8:11–15), the parables of seeing and hearing (8:16–18), and the new kinship (8:19–21). (CC p. 580)

**14:26** *hate his own father.* A vivid hyperbole, meaning that one must love Jesus even more than his immediate family (see Mal 1:2–3 for another use of the figure). See Mt 10:37. (CSB)

Hebrew idiom for hate. To love one thing and to hate another gives preference to the former. Cf Gn 29:30–31. God does not expect us to be cruel to the family He has given, but rather to love Him first. (TLSB)

Discipleship is an either/or situation. Either we love and hate everything that might possibly come between us and him, or else we cannot be his disciples. This phrase does not apply to Christian homes.

Both Luke 8 and Luke 14 describe barriers to true repentance and impediments to genuine discipleship. The parable of the sower told the disciples to expect a mixed reception with various responses to the Gospel they will preach. Here too are described the different reactions of hearers and catechumens, and the pitfalls they will encounter. The first type of catechumen (14:26) is one who comes to Jesus (ἔρχεται πρὸς με, “comes to me”) in the initial stage of inquiry when he first hears the Word and comes to hear more. The catechumen must be told what costs are involved in following Jesus, for there will be some who are unwilling to leave their human family for the sake of the kingdom. This corresponds to seed that fell on the road and was trampled and eaten by birds, as when the devil takes away the Word from the heart, in order that those who believe at first might not continue in faith and be saved (8:5, 12). These words jar our modern ears, where the human kinship of the nuclear family has such a lofty place, even within the church (see also the Fourth Commandment; Eph 6:1–4). Does Jesus really mean that we are to *hate* our father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, even our own soul? Matthew records the softer formulation that makes “hate” correspond to “not love more than” (Mt 10:37), i.e., we are not to love family “more than” Jesus and his kingdom. This is, in fact, the meaning of “hate” here, but Luke preserves the semitic expression in all its hardness. (CC pp. 580–581)

T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 229–30, has a helpful comment: “The term ‘hate’ (*misein*) is the opposite of ‘love’ (*agapao*; cf. 1:71; 6:[22], 27). The terms denote attitudes and modes of action, not emotions. The point is not how one feels toward parents and family but one’s effective attitude when it comes to a choice for the kingdom.” (CC p. 581)

This language of “hate” comes from the Torah,

Gen 29:30–31: “So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah and served Laban for another seven years. When Yahweh saw that Leah *was hated* [LXX—μισεῖται], he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren.” Deut 21:15–17:

If a man has two wives, the one loved and the other hated, and they have borne him children, both the loved and the hated [μισουμένη], and if the firstborn son is of her who is hated [μισουμένη], then on the day when he assigns his possessions as an inheritance to his sons, he may not treat the son of the loved [wife] as the firstborn in preference to the son of the hated [wife; τὸν υἱὸν τῆς μισουμένης], who is the firstborn, but he shall acknowledge the firstborn, the son of the hated [wife; τὸν υἱὸν τῆς μισουμένης], by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the first issue of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his.

See also Ex 32:27–29, where Moses instructs the people “and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbor. ... Today you have ordained yourselves for the service of Yahweh, each one at the cost of his son and of his brother that he [Yahweh] may bestow a blessing upon you this day.” (CC p. 581)

and it can only be understood in the context of Jesus’ overturning the Jewish laws of kinship and showing one’s true family is first and foremost the family of God, where membership is by grace through faith by means of catechesis and Baptism. If one sees this family as of first importance, then one can fear and love God and rightly love and honor fellow Christians and human family, in keeping with the Lord’s word: “My mother and my brothers are those who hear the Word of God and do it” (Lk 8:21). (CC p. 581)

False priorities crippled such a person’s discipleship. (TLSB)

**14:27** *bear his own cross*. οὐ βαστάζει τὸν σταυρὸν ἑαυτοῦ—The other reference to “taking up the cross” includes “daily” (9:23). Here to “carry” or “bear” the cross implies an ongoing situation. See comments at 9:23–27. (CC p. 578)

The second entailment of discipleship (Lk 14:27) clearly echoes an earlier call for the disciple to “deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (9:23). Now the crowd of catechumens are told to “carry [the] cross and come after me” (ἔρχεται ὀπίσω μου; 14:27). These are catechumens who have heard the Word, have left family, and understand the costs of discipleship. But as they travel with Jesus to Jerusalem, they begin to encounter rejection and persecution. This entailment of discipleship corresponds to the seed that fell on the rock and withered because of lack of moisture, like those who receive the Word with joy but have no roots and fall away in times of temptation (8:6, 13), which can include *persecution* (cf. 22:40–46). (CC p. 581)

Refers to Christ’s own death and His disciples’ willingness to follow in His sacrifice. (TLSB)

*cannot be my disciple* – οὐ δύναται εἶναι μου μαθητής—Luke repeats this phrase (14:26, 33) and so emphasizes discipleship. At this point Matthew records “is not worthy of me” (10:38). On μαθητής in Luke-Acts, see comments at 6:20. (CC p. 578)

**14:28-32** Jesus now interrupts the flow of his narrative with two parables, one that uses a building metaphor, and the other a metaphor about war. The theme of both is the same, namely that one is to *count the cost* before embarking on anything as serious as a huge building project or a full-scale war. This theme is signaled by the parallel language, i.e., that the builder/king must first sit down (14:28, 31; οὐχὶ πρῶτον καθίσας) and decide whether this is feasible. Eph 2:14–22 contains the same two motifs of the foundation and peace. Jesus is the one who makes peace between Jew and Gentile. All who are built on him and the foundation of his prophets and apostles are united as God’s holy temple. (CC pp. 581-582)

The two metaphors in Jesus’ parables clearly illustrate the first two entailments of discipleship. The catechumen builds his life on the firm foundation of the catechetical teaching of Jesus and the church. Through Baptism he enters into a new family, the family of God (6:48), which is greater than one’s human family. Such a catechumen is one who “hears my words and does them” (6:47). Baptized, he is crucified to the world and the world to him (Gal 6:14). The follower of Jesus loses the world and gains only a cross while in the world. One would never begin this new life without the resources to complete it, and these resources are supplied by Baptism and the Word. (CC p. 582)

Likewise the catechumen doesn’t rush off into Christ’s war thinking that he can win it himself. The enemy is fierce and the catechumen is outnumbered, and so the only way to win is to carry the cross Jesus carried and follow him, for he is the one who knows the terms for peace (τὰ πρὸς εἰρήνην; 14:32). The same expression will be used by Jesus as he weeps over Jerusalem and asks, “If only you—even you—had known in this day the things that have to do with peace [τὰ πρὸς εἰρήνην]! But now they are hidden from your eyes” (19:42). Will these same terms of peace be hidden from the catechumen’s eyes, crowded out by temptations and persecutions that he, like his Lord, might be called to endure? In both parables, crowds who would journey with Jesus are warned to first sit down, count the cost, and know what they lose and what they attain when going with Him. Catechumens are warned of the consequences of joining Christ on the ongoing journey to the heavenly Jerusalem. Both parables are in fact a call to repentance and faith in the one whose first destiny is the earthly Jerusalem and the cross. (CC 582)

**14:28** *count the cost*. Jesus did not want a blind, naive commitment that expected only blessings. As a builder estimates costs or a king evaluates military strength (v. 31), so a person must consider what Jesus expects of his followers. (CSB)

Substantial building, such as a fortress. (TLSB)

Either a man completes his building, or he becomes the object of ridicule for starting something he cannot finish. Jesus does not suggest he should consider erecting a less costly building or an alternate structure, because discipleship is not a half-way activity to be changed as we see fit. Its demands cannot be lessened; the level of our commitment is what must change.

**14:29** *will begin to mock him* – As an unfinished builder may be ridiculed, so those who falter in their discipleship dishonor themselves and the Gospel. (TLSB)

**14:30** *finish* – Complete the course and keep the faith. (TLSB)

2 Timothy 4:7, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”

**14:31-32** Same point is reinforced with a second comparison. (TLSB)

**14:31** *king going out to encounter another king* – Often, Christians feel outnumbered by the forces of the world. (TLSB)

**14:32** *terms of peace* – τὰ πρὸς εἰρήνην—“The things for peace,” in which πρὸς means “belonging to” or “necessary for” peace, i.e., “the terms of peace.” Cf. Lk 19:42; also 2 Pet 1:3; BAGD πρὸς, III, 5, b. (CC p. 578)

Jesus advises not mere compromise, but a sober look at reality and evaluation of the cost. (TLSB)

**14:33** *does not renounce all*. The cost, Jesus warned, is complete surrender to him. (CSB)

ἀποτάσσεται—In 9:61, a would-be disciple asks to “take leave of” (BAGD,1) his family; here Jesus uses the same verb as he instructs disciples to be prepared to “renounce, give up” (BAGD, 2) their possessions, echoing 12:33 and anticipating 18:22. (CC pp. 578-579)

τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ υπάρχουσιν—This is a common Lukan expression for possessions, one’s worldly goods. (Cf. Lk 8:3; 11:21; 12:15, 33, 44; 16:1; 19:8) (CC p. 579)

Possessions, along with hypocrisy, are stumbling blocks for the Pharisees. This is one of the major themes of Jesus’ long discourse of 12:1–13:21. (CC p. 582)

There are echoes also here from the Sermon on the Plain (6:20–49), and this theme concerning possessions will be picked up again in chapter 16. Throughout Jesus’ catechesis of his disciples, the proper use of possessions has been a major theme, since possessions are one of the greatest threats to discipleship. Could this entailment of discipleship correspond to the third kind of seed that falls among the thorns and as it grows up is choked with thorns? These are people who hear the Word but are choked by the anxieties and riches and pleasures of life (8:7, 14). (CC p. 582)

Being a disciple entails the readiness to give up anything if duty to God calls for it. (TLSB)

**14:25–33** Jesus illustrates the unconditional nature of discipleship. Consider well the radical demands of following Jesus, and be ready to meet them. Yet, count also the demands our salvation placed on the Son of God, who gave up all things for us. He is your tower and refuge of strength. • “Take myself, and I will be Ever, only, all for Thee.” Amen. (LSB 783:6). (TLSB)

*Salt Without Taste Is Worthless*

**34** “Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? 35 It is of no use either for the soil or for the manure pile. It is thrown away. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

**14:34** *Salt is good*. Ancient salt was made of several chemicals dried from seawater. Sodium chloride, true salt, could leach out, leaving other worthless minerals. So the Christian whose faith has eroded is no longer a Christian. (TLSB)

Jesus summarizes his teaching about discipleship with an enigmatic saying about salt. (There is a similar saying in Mt 5:13 in the Sermon on the Mount and in Mk 9:49–50.) Luke’s version of this saying accents the value of genuine salt. Salt is critical in a world that lacks other means for preserving food. Food that tastes bad might be redeemed by seasoning with salt. If salt were to lose its ability to preserve and season food, it would be useless, for there is no way to restore these qualities to salt (Lk 14:34). It would lose its purpose and would not even be suitable for other uses such as enhancing the soil or aiding decomposition in a rubbish pile (14:35). It should be thrown out, like those who came to the final banquet of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob without faith in Jesus as the Lord of the banquet (13:28). In the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:13), Jesus called the disciples “the salt of the earth” because through their presence in the world, Jesus is present. But if family ties, the burden of Jesus’ cross, and possessions hinder hearers from

becoming believing disciples, then they will be like tasteless salt, worthless and deserving of being thrown out. They are like the first three groups of seed that fell on the road, on the rocks, and among the thorns. They begin by hearing the Word, but eventually the entanglements of life cause them to fall away. (CC p. 583)

*but – οὐν*—The RSV leaves this untranslated, but the conjunction shows that these final verses are connected to the previous teaching about discipleship. (CC p. 579)

**14:35** *thrown away* – The partly desalinated compound could still harm the soil; therefore, it must be thrown away like a worthless servant into the outer darkness (Mt 25:30). (TLSB)

*let him hear* – The follower of Jesus needs to listen to everything He (Jesus) has to say, not only what one wants to hear. (PBC)

ὁ ἔχων ὄτα ἀκούειν ἀκούετω—Jesus issued this declaration earlier at 8:8; see textual note and comments there. On ἀκούω as a term for hearers/catechumens, see comments at 5:1; the Sermon on the Plain (6:27, 47, 49); the parable of the sower (8:8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 18); and Jesus’ discussion of the new kinship (8:21). (CC p. 579)

The seriousness of these entailments of discipleship is summed up by Jesus’ final words: “The one having ears to hear, let him hear” (Lk 14:35). The catechumen has heard these words before, at the conclusion of the parable of the sower (8:8). Not all are given ears to hear and eyes to see. The doctrine of election is involved here; see comments on 8:8, 9–10, 15. Once again, Jesus is calling the crowds to become hearers of the Word, that is, catechumens who follow him to Jerusalem, to the cross, and beyond that to the empty tomb and the heavenly “exodus” (9:31). But to be hearers of the Word they must take seriously the nature of Jesus’ call into a new family, carry their cross, and renounce their possessions. The road to heaven leads through Calvary. (CC p. 583)

**14:34–35** Christ’s people are “the salt of the earth” (Mt 5:13), purifying and seasoning it, because Christ is within them. He makes us Christians through God’s Word. • Spare us, O Christ, from a weak and insipid faith, that the world may taste and see that You are good. Amen. (TLSB)