



## GUIDELINES DAILY COMMENTARY ON LIVING WITH DR. HAROLD J. SALA

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### THE CROSS--THE BEGINNING OR THE END?

*Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." Luke 9:23*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German pastor who died for his faith during World War 2, wrote, "The cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise God-fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ. When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." Bonhoeffer's words point out two truths: one--the dread of the cross has not lost its grip on men and women who think that following Christ as they bear a cross is the end of a life of pleasure and normalcy, and two--the opposition of the world to the cross is unrelenting. It cost this uncompromising and committed German theologian and activist his very life. "Yes," you may think, "I'd rather be a live chicken than a dead hero." But would you, really?

Though you may never have thought much about it, Christianity without a cross is an oxymoron--a contradiction of terms. There can no more be a crossless Christianity than you can have a lake without water or spring flowers without the freezing of winter.

I am reminded of the old story of a boys' choir who wanted to begin their concert by marching down the aisle of the church bearing crosses singing lustily, "Onward Christian Soldiers, Marching as to war...." and so forth. "Not so," cried the rector of the church, adding, "We will not have barbaric crosses in this church." So the crosses were collected and stacked behind the door in the church office.

Not to be outstaged, however, the boys defying the rector sang, "Onward Christian soldiers, marching as to war, with the cross of Jesus *hid behind the door*." When the cross is removed, there is no Gospel, only a religious form, void of meaning and purpose, and when you think that you can follow Jesus Christ, reaping the benefits of the Christian experience, without taking your cross and following Him who gave His life on the cross, you are as foolish as one who expects to enjoy a garden without cultivating the soil or enjoy the blessings of parenting without giving birth to life or sustaining it through the long night hours.

Jesus challenged His disciples: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23). In addressing this issue--something which you and I must do to please Him--Jesus did not hurl the words at the disciples in anger, or present the cause in such a way as to motivate them through guilt. He stated the premise in simple and factual terms but he used strong words, "He must take up his cross..."

Is this the end of your personal life as some think? Or the beginning of freedom from everything that drags you down? Do you remember the scene from John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*? When Christian got to the cross, his burden began rolling down hill and was consumed by the sepulchre or the open tomb.

The cross and the one who bore the Roman cross to Calvary are inseparably linked together, and only when you take up your cross to follow Christ will you ever get to know Him and the power of His resurrection. It is impossible to have the fellowship of Christ apart from your following Him by taking up your cross.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was right. When Christ calls you, He calls you to come and to die to self and to sin, but He also invites you to live and to let His resurrected life bring you into a place of sweet fellowship and joy which you will never know otherwise.

When you follow Christ, you no longer control your destiny, but neither do you have to be concerned about the future because you follow Him one step, one day at a time.

Resource reading: Luke 23