

INTRODUCTION:

1) A strong warning from Jesus: Right after his performing the miracle of feeding the 5,000 with a simple lunch of a little boy, Jesus got serious with his followers. He asked his disciples if they truly know who he really is and what mission he came to this world for. (Luke 9:10-21) He wanted his disciples to see the ultimate price he had to pay to accomplish the mission his heavenly Father had for him: his pending death on the cross. He told them, “the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day, be raised to life.” (9:22) Then he began to warn his disciples of the price they must pay if they were truly his disciples: “If anyone would come to follow me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it if a man gains the whole world yet loses or forfeits his soul?” (9:23-25)

2) Three kinds of people in the world: Someone roughly classified all people in this world into three categories: a) those who cause things to happen, b) those who follow what has happened, and c) those who have no idea what happened. Unfortunately in the Christian circle, many Christians belong in the last category: those who have no idea what has happened. These Christians don't remember or care about the Great Commission the Lord has given them. They don't know they are to be the light of the world and the witnesses of Jesus. All they care about is to keep themselves in their little comfort zone: the little things in their lives, the few things they have and the little time in their lives they still have. Their existence doesn't contribute to the great plan of God to save souls in this world and to build that glorious kingdom of God. At the end, they would become “a burning stick snatched from the fire” (Amos 4:11), useless to God at best, or worse “be thrown outside in the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matt 8:12)

WHAT THEY WANT IN A COMFORT ZONE:

1) It's all about me, myself, and I: People who love to live in their comfort zone always focus on their own needs, desires and convenience. To them,

they are the center of their little world. Everything or everyone else is not important to them. They seek and do things only for their benefit.

2) Life is hard, so don't ask me anything: People who live in their comfort zone are those who see things from a pessimistic point of view. To them everything is too difficult, costs too much, so the best way is not to do anything, never get involved, “don't bother me.” They want to stay out of anything.

3) I know what is good for me: People who live in their comfort zone are those who believe they know what their own good is. These people will invest their resources, time, and energy in things they think will benefit themselves. They can give up anything about God, his will, his church, for their convenience or needs.

4) Life is good here, so don't change: “Peter said to Jesus: ‘Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters.’” (Matt 17:4) These people enjoy being with Jesus and all the good things that he makes possible. They don't care about anything or anyone else in the world. It is so good to be in the presence of God.

THE NEGATIVE NATURE OF A COMFORT ZONE:

1) Comfort zone cancels progress: The mentality of a comfort-zone dweller focuses on what is instead of what could be. If we are so comfortable in our present condition, why bother changing anything?

2) Comfort zone resists innovation: When people are happy with their situation there is no incentive to change for the better. This is true in all levels of life. These people have no idea of doing better, getting higher for the Lord.

3) Comfort zone confuses value: Being comfortable shuts out parts of life. When people focus all their attention, they miss other important things in life just to keep in their comfort zone. Their comfort becomes their most important thing in life. They don't have the ability to see things of higher value.

4) Comfort zone can become defensive: In many life situations, be it politics, social, education or other important issues of life, seeking to protect one's comfort zone can be a defense against changes or improvement. The intent to keep one's comfort zone could become defensive or confrontational, and therefore it is divisive, be it in politics, social, family or other areas of life.

A COMFORT ZONE HURTS CHRISTIAN GROWTH:

1) CZ creates compromised mentality: In order to keep oneself in the comfort zone, a person will compromise many vital Christian values, practices and even beliefs. He will focus more on enjoying life rather than being a witness for the Lord. Christians who love to stay in CZ usually are not serious about biblical principles or moral standards. They are more concerned about their own lives than obeying the commands of God in the bible.

2) CZ promotes selective practices: Christians who focus on CZ usually choose to follow biblical principles selectively: They will follow principles that are easy, with little or no sacrifice, and avoid following principles they see as too demanding, with too high a price to pay. They justify their disobedience with many excuses to protect their CZ.

3) CZ sees Christian duties as optional: People who prefer to stay in CZ usually will see God's clear commands as optional. Some examples are obedience to God's commands in daily life, religious faithfulness like worship, tithing, service in God's church, witnessing, moral integrity, etc. CZ people don't believe all these are mandatory from God. Most of them won't even care what God says.

4) CZ fosters a lazy attitude about eternity: Christians who adopt a CZ belief don't really care about soul winning or anything else in fulfilling their responsibility as God's people. They believe that once they are saved, they will take the free ride to heaven paid for by Jesus. These people either stay away from church entirely or come to enjoy all the good things in the church provided for them by the many sacrifices of others.

STEPS TO GET OUT OF A COMFORT ZONE JESUS' WAY: (Luke 9:23)

1) Refresh your commitment to Jesus: "If anyone would come to follow me." (9:23a) Every one of us has made that commitment when we accepted Jesus as our Lord and Savior and his forgiveness of sin. We pledged to follow him the rest of our lives. If anyone has forgotten his commitment to the Lord, now is the good time to refresh that commitment. We didn't just accept Jesus for his salvation, we also pledged to honor him as the Lord of our lives.

2) We need to deny our carnal desires: "He must deny himself." (9:23b) To deny ourselves means to say no to our carnal, sinful, selfish desires which in many ways are in direct contradiction to the biblical commands of God in our lives. As long as we live in this sinful body and live in this sinful world with all the temptations and distractions, we will face pitfalls to lure us away from God, and we need to say no to all of them.

3) We need to be willing to pay the price: “And take up his cross daily.” (23c) This is about our determination to pay the price to keep our promise to Jesus. Salvation is free to us because Jesus has paid it all. But Christian life and growth is not free of a price. We need to make the commitment: We will sacrifice many of the worldly gains and a sinful life to keep our commitment to the Lord. This is a long-term commitment: from today until that day we meet Jesus in heaven. Every day of our life, we want to keep doing that.

4) We need to set our eyes on Jesus: “And follow me.” (9:23d) As long as we live in this world in our sinful bodies, there are many temptations to lure us away from following Jesus to follow other things: personal gain, worldly values, sinful gratification, perverted lifestyles and practices, just to list a few. Throughout history, people have been lured away from following Jesus to following their own desires or the world's glamorous attractions. We need to remember: We follow only the Lord.

APPLICATIONS OF TRUTH:

1) This is a wake-up call: We are still in the mood of a new year 2015, a very good time to take a fresh look into our spiritual condition and future. Let us take a good look on the inside: Do we have a comfort zone in our spiritual life? Have you been slumbering in your little comfort zone, neglecting your spiritual growth all these years? Go back and read the first three parts of this message to see the true picture of what kind of Christian you are. You still have time to wake up and start growing.

2) This call is from Jesus: “What good is it for a man to gain the whole world but to forfeit his soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my word, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.” (9:25-26) Very seldom did Jesus give such a dire, serious warning in his teaching. This must be a very serious topic, that he is so straight and so blunt with his disciples. I know I am supposed to say nice words at the New Year time to make you feel good. But the Lord inspired me to present to you this honest timely message: Wake up, get rid of that comfort zone and start your spiritual growth like a true follower of Jesus.