

Man, It's Hard to Be a Christian!

Being a Christian can sure feel like an uphill fight all the way. When you think about all that Jesus said and you try to actually apply it to your life, it's really tough. Why? Because it doesn't come naturally. So much of what He taught goes against the grain of our nature as human beings. Look at the list below and ask yourself if what Jesus said in the following verses comes naturally to you.

Love your enemies.

Do good to those who hate you.

Bless those who curse you.

Pray for those who mistreat you.

Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also.

Whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either.

Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back.

Lend, expecting nothing in return.^[1]

Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.^[2]

He said other things that are hard to live, too.

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth.^[3]

Go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.^[4]

Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.^[5]

Jesus said these things (and a lot more), and He expects us to actually *do* them. That's the kicker. He really meant that you are supposed to *do* these things. And they're hard!

Obviously, if you are going to be a follower of Jesus, it's going to cost you.

Why would anyone be willing to follow Him, considering how hard it is? There are a lot of good reasons, but I'll mention just two.

(1) Because the man who said these things is God.

Here was Jesus, the Word of God, the expression of the Father, walking the earth saying these things. If He was expressing God's thoughts, if He was articulating the way God thinks about

things, if He was telling mankind what God thought was important, or which of man's actions or attitudes were valuable to God, then it's a good idea to seriously consider trying to do what He said—even if it's hard.

I'm pretty sure He knew that living what He said and following Him would be hard, because He was also human and underwent all the temptations we do. But He said what He said anyway.

He had to know that a lot of what He asked of us as disciples would go against natural human instinct. Humans tend to be proud; if someone hits us or steals from us or takes advantage of us in business, we often feel like retaliating in some way. We're often selfish, or at least self-serving, by nature. Because it's natural to be that way, it's difficult *not* to be.

Yet Jesus was clearly trying to show that He expected us to act in ways that don't conform to our human nature. I'd say He was intentionally challenging us by giving us a glimpse of how He wants us to be. After all, He did say, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word."^[6] So there was some expectation that we would try to do just that—even if it's hard.

(2) The second reason is a little less noble than doing it because God Himself said it, and that is, "What's in it for me?"

That's a fair question, isn't it? I mean, being a Christian is hard, right? If I'm going to do those things, surely there should be some compensation in return.

Well, Jesus is fair; He's not offering a something-for-nothing deal. So let's take a look at the package.

First, you've got eternal life, and that's major. Knowing that you will live forever is an important part of the package. You've got to think long-term—very long-term. It's wise to not only make do for now, but also to put something forward for then. And *then* is a very long time. When you're thinking about what you're going to get, you want to look forward to the future, to invest now for then.

It's pretty clear in Scripture that there are rewards given in the afterlife that are connected to how we lead our temporal lives.

Revelation 22:12 says, *Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done* (NIV).

Colossians 3:23–24: *Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving* (NIV).

1 Corinthians 3:11–14 says, *For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward* (NIV).

Luke 6:22–23: *Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets (KJV).*

Matthew 16:27 says, *For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works (NKJV).*

Besides rewards in the afterlife, God rewards us in *this* life as well.

Mark 10:28–30: *Peter began to say to Him, "Behold, we have left everything and followed You." Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake, but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life (NASB).*

Matthew 6:3–4: *When you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly (NKJV).*

Jesus clearly states that we should build up treasure in heaven.

Matthew 6:20 says, *Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal (NASB).*

There's a clear case made in the Scriptures that we will be rewarded, both in this life and the next, for doing the things that Jesus said we should do—even though they are hard. Perhaps the fact that they *are* so hard has something to do with why we are rewarded by God for doing them.

So two reasons for doing these tough things are that God said we should do them, and that we will be rewarded for doing them—both now and later. Let's look at the later rewards for a minute.

He says that we have the means of laying up treasure in heaven. That's like investing in the future—making right decisions now that will make our future better. Perhaps it's a bit like putting money in the bank.

What I'm about to say might sound money-minded, but I think it helps to make the point.

Imagine that for every time you showed love or kindness to someone, 100 euros was deposited in your bank account. Or that every time you witnessed to someone, 500 euros were banked. What if you loaned someone money and didn't expect it back, but you received double the money in your account? Or if every time you turned the other cheek, a check was deposited?

If that happened, then doing what Jesus said wouldn't seem so hard, would it?

We're going to live forever. It's wise to invest in the future.—Even if it's hard.

^[1] Luke 6:27–30, 35 NASB.

^[2] Mark 16:15 NKJV.

^[3] Matthew 6:19 NASB.

^[4] Mark 10:21 NASB.

^[5] Luke 12:15 NIV.

^[6] John 14:23 NASB.