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# THE PORTRAYAL OF DISCIPLESHIP IN MARK 8:34

BY

CHRISTINE GAMBRELL

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF

COVENANT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS IN EXEGETICAL THEOLOGY

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ABSTRACT OF

THE PORTRAYAL OF DISCIPLESHIP IN MARK 8:34

by Christine Gambrell

Jesus' call to discipleship in Mk. 8:34 is uncompromising in what it asks of any would-be followers of Jesus: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." However, the way in which this passage has been viewed and used throughout the history of the church and into the present day has not always been either clear or biblically based. The definitions of "self-denial" and "cross-bearing," as well as the nature of discipleship itself, are variously interpreted, but all with appeal to Mk. 8:34 for foundation. The question remains – what did Jesus mean in this call to discipleship? How was this call heard in its first-century context – both pre- and post-crucifixion? How are we to apply and understand it today?

This thesis seeks to address these issues by addressing the primary question of how discipleship is portrayed in Mk. 8:34. The following areas will be considered in order to answer this. First, a brief introduction to the gospel of Mark, including its background, authorship, date, structure, and themes will be given. In chapter 2, the historical and cultural background for Jesus' call of discipleship will be examined, focusing on the OT foundations for discipleship as well as the first-century Greco-Roman and Jewish paradigms for discipleship. A discussion of the nature of "following" in relationship to discipleship, as well as the ways in which Jesus' form of discipleship and his call in Mk. 8:34 fit into first-century paradigms, will also be addressed. Chapter 3

discusses the concepts of self-denial and cross-bearing. By means of a word study of the verb ἀπαρνέομαι (to "deny"), the concept of denial and self-denial in the NT will be explored. Cross-bearing is addressed in terms of the historical practice of crucifixion, the literary context of Mk. 8:34, and the theological relationship of Christ's cross to the idea of bearing one's own cross. Chapter 4 addresses the verb tenses of the call to discipleship within 8:34 and their implications for interpretation of the call. Chapter 5 looks at Mk. 8:35-37 as commentary on 8:34, especially focusing on the meaning of ψυχή ("soul" or "person"), the paradox within 8:35-37, and the allusion to Ps. 49:7-9. Chapter 6 provides a conclusion for the thesis, as well as noting several ways in which we must be careful to speak of discipleship in the church today. This includes looking at the concept of the "cost" to discipleship, the place of emotional health within discipleship, and the scope of discipleship.

The conclusion is made that every word and concept within Jesus' call to discipleship in Mk. 8:34 point towards one theme: allegiance with surrender. The concepts of following/discipleship, self-denial, and cross-bearing all have to do with allegiance, while the verb tenses and an exegetical examination of 8:35-37 further support this claim. It is exclusive allegiance to Christ and complete relinquishment of determining one's own life which is portrayed as the fundamental nature of discipleship. In Jesus' call to discipleship in Mk. 8:34, he is requiring absolute allegiance and submission to himself.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated first to my parents, Barb and Dan, who first guided me in and gave me a love for the Lord and studying His Word.

I am also especially indebted to Dr. Hans Bayer, my thesis reader, whose class on Discipleship in Mark's Gospel first interested me in these verses and opened my eyes to the nature of surrender within discipleship.

Finally, it is dedicated to my husband, Dave, whose unfailing love and confidence in me have supported me and spurred me along in excellence.

Lord Jesus, may this work be glorifying to you and useful to your people.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| BDAG | Arndt, William, Walter Bauer, Frederick W. Danker, and F.W. Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000. |
| BDB | Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, and Charles Briggs. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996. |
| *EDNT* | Balz, Horst, and Gerhard Schneider, eds. *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990. |
| ESV | HOLY BIBLE: ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION, Copyright ©2001, 2007 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. |
| LXX | Septuagint; a translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek; compiled during the third and second centuries B.C. |
| *NIDNTT* | Brown, Colin, ed. *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986. |
| NT | New Testament. |
| OT | Old Testament. |
| *TDNT* | Kittel, Gerhard, and Geoffrey Bromiley, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Translated and edited by Geoffrey Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964. |
| *TDOT* | Botterweck, G. Johannes, and Helmer Ringgrem, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Translated by John T. Willis and Geoffrey W. Bromiley (pp. 1-358) and David E. Green (pp. 359-463), 3:388-403. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978. |
| P45 | Manuscript Papyrus 45. |

## Introduction

Jesus' call to discipleship in Mk. 8:34 is uncompromising in what it asks of the disciple: "If anyone wishes to follow after me, he must deny himself, pick up his cross, and follow me."[1] Its forceful and definite nature is easily seen and felt, but its meaning for the disciple is perhaps not so easily determined. It has been my experience that throughout the modern-day evangelical world of Christianity, the ideas present within this call to discipleship are thrown around in an extremely unexamined way. Believers read "deny himself" and attempt to fill in some of the blanks in order to better explain it – often without realizing they have done so.[2] "Deny himself *things*" is one popular understanding, in which the "practice" of self-denial as a discipline excludes various possessions or parts of life in the name of discipleship.[3] "*Ignore* himself" is another interpretation, and the call becomes to be intentionally unaware of what feelings, thoughts, and longings reside within the heart. Any longing or feeling – anything originating out of "self" – becomes suspect at the least, and to be continually distrusted,

[1] My translation.

[2] The various popular interpretations of the passage which follow are sometimes as explicit as the way in which I explain them; more often, however, these are the natural implications of what a writer says. He or she may not come right out and say, "Ignore self!" but this is where their line of thought easily leads the reader. Additionally, many of the popular sources cited here, when read in full, have some biblical and profound things to say about discipleship. However, they still, at times, fall into these various pitfall interpretations (as will be noted).

[3] As will be further addressed in Chapter 6, one popular way in which this is expressed is in the common Lenten practice of giving things up.

disregarded, and repressed.[4] "Deny *his own needs*" is another way of understanding it, in which a person empties himself of normal humanness, essentially, and "lives only for Christ" without regard to bodily or emotional needs.[5] Self-denial is pitted against inappropriate self-esteem, against self-indulgence, and against self-care. Self-denial can be seen as the opposite of even *having* a self, at times. "Less of me, and more of you" is a prayer which, although correctly picking up on the goal of the Christian life to be wholly redeemed and made holy, easily derails into becoming less of a person, less of a "self."

The idea of "bearing one's cross" is even more carelessly interpreted. "We all have our crosses to bear" is a statement often heard about a variety of difficulties, from being used in jest ("I am teaching at a conference in Florida next week – we all have our crosses to bear!"), to expressing frustration over minor inconveniences (such as the habitual lateness of a spouse or children), to temptations, to long-term sickness, to difficult relationships, and so on. Believers can tend to view a "cross" as anything unpleasant which happens in life, and then spiritualize it as part of discipleship.[6] Thus,

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[4] For an example of this, see: Bob Hoekstra, "Following Jesus as a Disciple," *Day By Day By Grace*, BlueLetterBible.org, http://www.blueletterbible.org/devotionals/dbdbg/view.cfm?Date=1219 (accessed April 16, 2013). Hoekstra equates self-denial with being unwilling to indulge the flesh, to give it any room, or to put "any hope in the natural resources of the flesh." The goal is to "repudiate self-sufficiency, self-help, self-righteousness, self-exaltation, and the like." While we would obviously affirm that the Christian life leaves no room for self-exaltation or self-sufficiency, his presentation of it alongside "self-help" is somewhat confusing. Along with an emphasis on repression of the flesh, the reader might well take from this that anything with "self" is a dangerous, fleshly commodity to be ignored.

[5] In Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *The Cost of Discipleship*, he says, "To deny oneself is to be aware only of Christ and no more of self, to see only him who goes before and no more the road which is too hard for us…If in the end we know only him, if we have ceased to notice the pain of our own cross, we are indeed looking only unto him" (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (1959; repr., New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 88). While we would of course affirm Bonhoeffer's emphasis on fixing the gaze on Christ, it is easy to see how his words of being unaware of self and no longer feeling pain can imply being less of a "self," or could lead to ignoring things such as self-care and legitimate needs.

[6] See: Ray C. Stedman, "The Way of the Cross," RayStedman.org, http://www.raystedman.org/new-testament/mark/the-way-of-the-cross (accessed April 16, 2013). Stedman describes the cross as anything that is shaming or frustrating to us, "a symbol of those circumstances and events in our experience which humble us, expose us, offend our pride, shame us, and reveal our basic evil."

discipleship basically becomes synonymous with smiling during an unpleasant experience or lifestyle, whether the unpleasantness be merely irritating or full-blown suffering. The pain of suffering is thus ignored or invalidated, as suffering is seen as what Christ calls us to, and thus to be almost enjoyed or sought after.

In addition to these prevalent misinterpretations are the more extreme interpretations which various movements of the church have held regarding this call to discipleship. Some see this as a call to martyrdom as Christ was martyred, or at the very least, to severe suffering. Others see it as primarily being *ready* for martyrdom (without specificity as to what this means), or as living an ascetic lifestyle of martyrdom (similar to denying one's self "things" above).[7] Although these more radical interpretations are not the predominant view in evangelical Christianity in America today, there is a sense in which we still elevate and revere those who do these things as "super-disciples," and as worthy of more respect than the average Christian. While there is no need to belittle the sacrifice that Christians in extreme circumstances make (and indeed, Christ's work through his people's faithfulness should be celebrated), it is also questionable to view them as so very different from other believers. Is faithfulness in discipleship primarily about physical death and suffering?

These various interpretations have existed throughout the history of the church – sometimes explicitly stated, and sometimes, easily misunderstood from what theologians

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[7] In chapter 3, some martyrdom proponents will be cited. Those who choose to live an ascetic lifestyle can be seen throughout the history of the church. For example, one of the first monks, Anthony, who lived in the desert, seeking solitude. When he missed the pleasures of his former life, he would further deny himself things, making his life more strict. For a further discussion of Anthony and the early movement of monasticism, see: Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper Collins, 2010), 1:157-172. In the contemporary church, these habits of asceticism can still be seen. I have had friends within the last ten years who lived a season of life intentionally dressing unattractively and simply, refusing to use makeup or bodily-care products, for the purpose of better discipleship.

have said. For instance, Tertullian said that bearing the cross has to do with "your own anxieties and your sufferings in your own body, which itself is shaped as a cross."[8] Basil the Great wrote that cross-bearing had to do with "readiness to die for Christ, the mortification of one's members on this earth, preparedness for every danger which might befall us on behalf of Christ's name, detachment from this life."[9] Luther wrote in reference to the disciples leaving their fishing nets for Jesus:

> For so long as the heart is attached to these physical and visible things, it cannot live in faith. To take the cross and leave all things in the word of faith is a hard thing, for the cross kills the passionate craving for these things and makes one willing to renounce them, but faith sustains the mortified by other means neither seen nor experienced.[10]

While Luther seems to be stating that attachment to Christ must be the greatest of all, his statement is somewhat easily misunderstood as avoiding attachment to all worldly things, as is Basil the Great's. Others write that even "innocent desires that conflict with duty must be suppressed," and that this is the meaning of self-denial.[11] Even those who emphasize that self-denial has less to do with particular actions and more to do with an attitude of the heart towards Jesus' lordship can slip into advising denial *of things* as the road towards holiness.[12]

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[8] Tertullian, *On Idolatry* 12, as quoted in *Mark*, eds. Thomas C. Oden and Christopher A. Hall, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture II (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 112.

[9] Basil the Great, *The Long Rules*, as quoted in *Luke,* ed. Arthur A. Just, Jr., Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture III (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 156.

[10] Martin Luther, *Luther's Meditations on the Gospels*, trans. and arr. by Roland H. Bainton (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962), 43.

[11] James H. Snowden, *Scenes and Sayings in the Life of Christ* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1903), 191.

[12] Walter J. Chantry, *The Shadow of the Cross: Studies in Self-Denial* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1981), 27.

What is confusing about these interpretations is that they *almost* line up with biblical teaching. Christians are to rejoice in suffering, are to reject the "old man" and live as a "new man," are to expect pain and suffering – as persecution, as discipline, and as part of living in a broken world – and are to fix their eyes on Jesus instead of on themselves. These things are all true, and supported elsewhere in Scripture. But what is it that "self-denial," "cross-bearing," and "following" Jesus refer to within Mk. 8:34, a verse which is often used to support these myriad conclusions?

This thesis seeks to answer this question. Instead of "borrowing biblical words as slogans"[13] for life and discipleship, I will endeavor to look at how Mk. 8:34 is presented in the text itself. What is it that Jesus is requiring of any who would follow after him? How are we to understand following him, denying self, and bearing a cross? How is discipleship presented by this verse? Is this a call to martyrdom? To ignore self? To suffering? What about the very direct, or almost "harsh" nature to this call – at what is this "harshness" directed? My goal in this thesis is to define what Mk. 8:34 says about the nature of discipleship under Christ.

**Summary of Contents and Methodology**

Throughout this thesis, it will be assumed that this call to discipleship had meaning for those who originally heard Jesus speak it, for those who heard Mark's gospel in the first century A.D., and for those who believe in Christ and follow him today. In order to more fully understand what Jesus is calling all his disciples to in Mk. 8:34, the following areas will be examined.

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[13] Jack Collins, "Prophets," (Lecture, Covenant Theological Seminary, St. Louis, MO, February 27, 2012).

In chapter one, a brief introduction to the gospel of Mark, including its background, authorship, date, structure, and themes will be given. The immediate context within which Mk. 8:34 lies will also be addressed. This will help to place Jesus' call to discipleship in its appropriate context.

In the second chapter, the historical and cultural background of discipleship will be examined in order to provide the backdrop to Jesus' call of "follow me." This will clarify what paradigms the original audience(s) would have been familiar with and what expectations for discipleship were present in first century Palestine. The OT foundations for discipleship, as well as the Greco-Roman and Jewish cultural paradigms for discipleship, will be included. Following this, it will be noted in what ways Jesus' form of discipleship fits and strays outside of the first century expectations and parameters for discipleship. This will then be applied to give a greater framework for what Jesus means when he says, "Follow me."

In the third chapter, two of the main concepts in Mk. 8:34 will be examined: the meaning of "self-denial," and the nature of "cross-bearing." Self-denial will be addressed by means of an in-depth word study on ἀπαρνέομαι, focusing especially on the verb's usage in the NT. The concept of "cross-bearing" will be looked at through historical, literary, and theological lenses in order to understand "cross-bearing" as it would have been understood in first century Palestine, as it is introduced within the gospel of Mark, and as it is spoken of throughout the NT.

Chapter 4 will address the verb tenses of the call to discipleship, along with their implications for the meaning of the call. Chapter 5 looks at 8:35-37 as a commentary on 8:34, especially focusing on the meaning of ψυχή, the meaning of the paradox within

these verses, and the presence of an allusion to Ps. 49:7-9. Chapter 6 gives conclusions as to the meaning of Mk. 8:34 which chapters 1-5 elucidate, as well as applying these concepts to modern-day discipleship practice and problems within the church.

My own personal goal in this thesis has been to gain a greater understanding of how to talk about and explain discipleship, especially in terms of how it relates to the inner workings of a person. As I have so often heard this passage given as a justification for all sorts of attitudes and actions which hurt rather than promote health within Christ's people, I felt that an in-depth look at this clear call to discipleship would benefit not only my own heart, but God's people as well.

## Chapter 1

## Introduction to the Gospel of Mark as Context for Mark 8:34

A brief summary of the background of the gospel of Mark will help place 8:34 within its context. The gospel of Mark was most likely written by John Mark, the cousin of Barnabas, whom Paul refused to take on his second missionary journey. It is also likely that Mark's gospel has a connection to the apostle Peter, as claimed by the bishop Papias in the early second century.[14] A date for the gospel of Mark has been claimed from the 40's to the 70's A.D., but it seems most likely that it was written in the late 50's or early 60's, before the traditional date for the apostle Peter's death in the persecution under Nero in 64/65 A.D.[15] The audience of Mark is traditionally held to be the church in Rome, and while there is evidence for this, it cannot be definitively proven.[16] It is clear, however, that the intended audience of Mark did include Gentiles, as Mark takes care to translate Aramaic expressions in the gospel, as well as to explain Jewish customs (as in

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[14] It is not the purpose of this thesis to defend the authorship of Mark for Mark's gospel, or to defend his connection to Peter. For a fuller discussion of authorship, see: D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo's *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005): 172-177. Carson and Moo note there seems to be no reason to disbelieve Mark's connection with Peter, and that there are a number of indicators (albeit not exceptionally strong ones) that suggest Mark as the author, with Peter as his main source.

[15] Carson and Moo, 182. For a fuller discussion on the dating of Mark, see Carson and Moo's *An Introduction to the New Testament*, pp. 179-182. James A. Brooks and Allen Black also go with a date before Peter's death; Craig A. Evans goes with late 60's in order to explain the elements in Mark's gospel which seem to emphasize the impending destruction of Jerusalem. See: Allen Black, *Mark,* The College Press NIV Commentary, (1995; repr., Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Company, 2001), 20; also James A. Brooks, *Mark*, The New American Commentary 23 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991), 28; and Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, Word Biblical Commentary 34B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), lxiii.

[16] Brooks, 28, and Carson and Moo, 183. For a fuller discussion, see Carson and Moo pp. 177-183.

Mk. 7:3-4).[17] Several commentators also note the "Latinisms" within the gospel, noting that this would fit well with the tradition of a Roman audience.[18] However, if we do take a date in the late 50's or early 60's with an audience in Rome, it is also quite possible that the audience contained Jews as well, as Claudius' ban on Jews in Rome would have been lifted. In this thesis, I will assume Markan authorship in the late 50's or early 60's, as well as a connection with Peter and the Roman church, including both Gentiles and Jews.

We now turn to the form and content of the gospel of Mark. Mark's gospel is not simply a biography or history of Jesus, but an account which best fits within the ancient genre of *bios*.[19] A *bios* in the ancient world was a historically accurate but not exhaustive account of a person's life, intended to make a statement about that person and what they stood for.[20] The author's intent was for the audience to imitate the main character.[21] Mark's gospel does not perfectly fit in this category, however, as Mark makes it clear that his main character's purpose is to intentionally go to his own death.[22] However, noting the genre of Mark's gospel does make clear that his purpose is to "describe Jesus in such a way as to promote loyalty to him and his teaching,"[23] expressed not only through the content of his gospel, but in the format he has chosen, as well.[24]

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[17] Black, 18.

[18] Brooks, 28, Carson and Moo 183.

[19] Hans F. Bayer, *A Theology of Mark: the Dynamic Between Christology and Authentic Discipleship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2012), 10.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid., 12.

[22] Ibid., 10.

[23] Brooks, 25.

[24] Bayer, 9.

The purpose of Mark's gospel is best seen in two of the prominent themes which emerge from it: discipleship and Christology. Mark most fundamentally wants to answer the questions of "who Jesus is," and what it means to follow him.[25] His purpose is to "legitimize Jesus' universal and authoritative call to discipleship."[26] The structure of the gospel also reflects this. There is general consensus that the gospel is divided into two large sections, with a shift in 8:27-30 as Peter proclaims Jesus as the Christ.[27] Up until 8:27, Jesus' ministry has been in and around Galilee, focusing on the many displays of his authority and power.[28] Black writes that it is the question which the disciples pose in Mk. 4:41 which echoes throughout this first half of the gospel – who is this, who even commands the winds and the waves?[29] After this "watershed" of Peter's confession in 8:27-30, Jesus begins to journey towards Jerusalem, and the focus of the narrative shifts towards Jerusalem and Jesus' death.[30] In this second half, Jesus is no longer portrayed as simply the authoritative Lord, but as the authoritative son of God who is submitted to God's will to suffer and die on behalf of humanity.[31] Throughout this portrayal of Christ as the rightful and authoritative Lord over mankind, Mark makes clear that a response is required: discipleship. This is especially clear in 8:31-10:45, a section which clearly highlights discipleship. In 8:31-10:45, there are three passion predictions, followed by

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[25] Carson and Moo, 186.

[26] Bayer, 24.

[27] Brooks, 31.

[28] Black, 21.

[29] Ibid.

[30] R. Alan Cole, *Mark*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989), 87.

[31] Black, 22.

three statements about what following Jesus entails. Bayer notes that this section is also bracketed on either side by the healing of a blind man, further setting it apart as its own section within the narrative.[32] Thus, 8:34-37 lies within a context which is already highly emphasizing the necessity and nature of discipleship to Christ, as well as Christ's ultimate purpose (death and resurrection). Mk. 8:31-10:45 makes an intentional connection between Jesus' impending death and its implications for his followers. What connection is being made will be further elucidated as we study the concepts, exegesis, and context of 8:34 more in depth, but it is important at this point to note that 8:34 comes at the beginning of a section of Mark's gospel which very intentionally examines the connection between Jesus' death and his authority to call followers to discipleship.

[32] Bayer, 21.

## Chapter 2

## The Historical and Cultural Background of Discipleship: the Backdrop to Jesus' Call to "Follow Me"

### Introduction

In Mk. 8:34, Jesus calls together a crowd, along with his disciples, and says, "Follow me." Throughout the gospel of Mark – and indeed, throughout the gospels as a whole – this is Jesus' way of inviting and calling disciples to himself.[33] What is less clear, however, is how the first century hearers of these words would have perceived such a call, and what precisely Jesus meant by it. In this chapter, we will address the contours of the concept of "following" Jesus. First, the OT theological background of the concept of "following" will be examined, followed by the prevailing first century cultural paradigms for discipleship of both the Greco-Roman and Jewish worlds. After this, we will look at the concept of "following" Jesus in the gospel of Mark particularly, and note the ways in which it differs from and reflects the prevailing ideas about discipleship and "following" in the first century Palestinian mind. Having examined the roots of Jesus' call to discipleship in these various areas, conclusions as to the nature of Jesus' call to follow him – both within Mark and particularly in 8:34 – will be made, including whether or not Jesus intended a literal or metaphorical "following" for his disciples. Finally, we will

[33] The calling pattern of Jesus in Mark will be further discussed below. It will suffice here to note the passages in which it is clear that Jesus' call to "follow" him is a call to become one of his disciples – Mk. 1:17, 20, 2:14, 10:21.

note what implications this understanding of Jesus' call to "follow" has for the modern-day believer.

**OT background**

Upon a cursory look at the OT, there is little discipleship terminology which lexically matches the NT terminology. The Hebrew תַּלְמִיד, which is the equivalent of the Greek μαθητής, is only in 1 Chr. 25:8, the context of which makes it clear that it simply refers to a student (as opposed to a teacher). The adjective לִמֻּד, meaning "taught" and coming from the same stem למד, occurs six times in the OT, all within the prophets.[34] Both references in Jeremiah have the force of "accustomed to" rather than "taught," indicating in both 2:24 and 13:23 a customary way of life.[35] In Isaiah, the references retain the meaning "taught" (as in, a receiver of teaching), but contextually do not indicate a relationship more than this.[36] The OT does not use the terminology of "disciple" or "discipleship" as the NT does.[37]

However, the concept of discipleship runs deeply throughout the OT, especially as of the discipleship of God's people by God himself on a "national" level.[38] Both the covenant relationship of God with his people – the very heartbeat and foundation of the

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[34] It is used in Isa. 8:16, 50:4 (twice), 54:13, Jer. 2:24, 13:23.

[35] M. J. Wilkins, *Following the Master* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992): 56.

[36] Wilkins claims that these references indicate that there could be a "recognizable category of persons in Israel" referred to in these passages (Wilkins, 56). This could be argued, as Is. 8:16 has a possessive ending ("my taught ones"), and along with the references in 50:4, the adjective is used as a substantive. Regardless of whether or not Isaiah is here referencing a recognizable group of people, he does not do so in a way which indicates that they are other than those who learn, in some way, from him.

[37] The word μαθητής is not found in the LXX. There are three places in which it is a textual variant: for μαθήματα in Jer. 13:21 (translating the Hebrew for "friend, companion"), and for μαχητὴς/μαχηταὶ in Jer. 20:11 and Jer. 26:9 (LXX reference, 46:9 in the English from the Masoretic text). However, it is not in the Masoretic text as μαθητής.

[38] Ibid., 57.

OT – and the language which the OT writers use to explain what this covenant relationship looks like unmistakably set the stage for the NT concept of discipleship. Although the same terminology isn't explicitly used, the concept of discipleship of God's people by God himself reverberates to the very core of the OT and runs throughout its entirety.

Throughout the OT, God makes covenants with humanity – first with Adam, then with Noah and Abraham, with the people of Israel, and finally, with the Davidic line. In each of these covenants, God initiates and invites into relationship, and the recipients of the covenant are to embrace this relationship with God and to shape their lives around it.[39] This formula – "divine initiative and human response" which involves a life aligned with God's – is found in every covenant God makes with his people.[40] These covenants are the foundation of the OT. They are the expression of the relationship between God and his people which the prophets constantly call the people back to, the kings are to lead in, and the priests are to mediate. The entire OT centers around God's covenant(s) with Israel. This pattern of a divine initiative which invites a committed relationship with life-implications – a pattern familiar to the NT believer – not only shows up in the OT, but is its foundation.

But the parallel to NT discipleship does not end here; it is also reflected in the language used to describe life in covenant with Yahweh. The OT consistently uses the verb הלך, meaning "to go, come, or walk" (along with a range of other meanings)[41] to

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[39] See for example Ex. 20:1, Dt. 4:35-40, 2 Sam. 7, Jer. 7:23, Ez. 36:28.

[40] Wilkins, 53.

[41] BDB, s.v. "הלך"

depict the human response and commitment to the covenant. The images of walking after, before, with, and in the ways of Yahweh appear throughout the OT to describe and reference what life in the covenant community of God looks like – an image which is most definitely present in the NT conception of discipleship, and especially in Mk. 8:34. Despite the absence of language lexically meaning "disciple" in the OT, the הלך imagery which the biblical writers consistently employ shows that the concepts of discipleship in discipleship-like terminology are throughout the OT, and inherent in its covenantal foundation.

We will first address the closest lexical parallel to the language found in Mk. 8:34. In the LXX, הלך אַחֲרֵי ("follow after") is brought across most often by πορεύω + ὀπίσω, but also by ἀκολουθέω + ὀπίσω, the wording of Mk. 8:34.[42] Unlike the other uses of הלך which will be addressed, הלך אַחֲרֵי is used both with reference to following after Yahweh and to following after other gods. Although it is most often used to describe following after other gods rather than Yahweh, the concept of "follow after" is either directly related to relationship of God or rejection of relationship with God. It is used of following after God by Samuel in his farewell address to Israel in 1 Sam. 12:14, in Deut. 13:4 as a commandment to faithfulness to God, and in reference to Josiah's renewing the covenant in 2 Ki. 23:3 and 2 Chr. 34:31.[43] Its covenantal implications are clear in the passages in which it speaks of following other gods, too. In Jdgs. 2:11-13, the people of

[42] Gerhard Kittel, "ἀκολουθέω," in *TDNT*, 1:211.

[43] It is also used of Caleb's faithfulness to Yahweh in Deut. 1:36, and of David's in 1 Ki. 14:8. It should be noted that these concepts of walking after/before/with/in the ways of Yahweh are also used of individuals in the OT. This does not detract, however, from the national covenantal relationship Yahweh has with Israel. Instead, these individuals personally embraced the covenant made with the entire people of Israel (Wilkins, 59). Additionally, it is mostly leaders (such as Caleb and Joshua in Nu. 32:12 or David in 1 Ki. 14:8 and other places) that are singled out in this way. This highlights the leaders' special role in guiding the people in covenant faithfulness.

Israel "follow after" other gods, which is equivalent in the passage to "abandoning" Yahweh. In Deut. 6:14, it is used shortly after the Shema to parallel "forgetting" Yahweh, and is explicitly called covenant-breaking in Jer. 11:10. In 1 Ki. 18:21, Elijah uses the phrase to speak both of following Yahweh and of following other gods. He demands that the people choose which one they will "follow after." The picture of "follow after" throughout the OT – whether in reference to Yahweh or another god – has direct covenantal implications, and is used to describe devotion either to God or rejection of God and devotion to another. "Following after" is the picture of exclusive allegiance and devotion in the OT.[44]

Other phrases in which הלך is used as an image of covenant relationship are "walking before the Lord" (לִפְנֵי), "walking with the Lord" (אֶת), and "walking in the ways of Yahweh," often with דֶּרֶךְ. Walking before the Lord is often used in reference to the lives of the kings, and seems to characterize the life which is lived according to God's law (covenant faithfulness).[45] It is often used of David in particular.[46] Walking with God is used of Noah to explain his righteousness in contrast to the world around him in Gen. 6:9, and in Micah 6:8 of the kind of life which God desires of the righteous. Walking in the ways of Yahweh is found in Deuteronomy especially, but also upon Israel's entrance into the land in Jos. 22:5, throughout Kings, and in the prophets and Psalms. Walking in God's ways is shorthand for faithfulness to God, while departing from his ways denotes

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[44] Jesus makes similar statements in the gospels, such as, "Whoever is not with me is against me" (Mt. 12:30, Lk. 11:23), and "No one can serve two masters" (Mt. 6:24).

[45] F. J. Helfmeyer, "הלך," in *TDOT*, 3:393.

[46] See 1 Ki. 3:6, 8:23-25, 9:4. In 1 Ki. 2:4, this is how David charges his son Solomon while on his deathbed.

unfaithfulness.[47] In Deut. 10:12, walking in the ways of Yahweh, and fearing, loving, and serving him are what the Lord "requires" of his covenant people. Throughout the Psalms, the psalmists speak of the desire and blessing to walk in the ways of God (Ps. 119:3, 128:1, 143:8). In 2 Ki. 21:21-22, King Amon's lack of faithfulness to God is summed up by the writer's noting that he did not walk in the ways of God, but of his father Manasseh.[48] In all of these phrases, the image of "walking" with, before, or in the ways of Yahweh is used by the OT writers as a metaphor for faithful covenant relationship with Yahweh.

One final aspect of OT discipleship must be noted: between human beings. There are several relationships in the OT which Josephus refers to with the term μαθητής and which do have a special quality about them: Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, and Jeremiah and Baruch.[49] In some ways, these relationships do reflect formal discipleship-like qualities. In each, one man accompanies the other and learns from him. In the case of Elijah and Elisha, there is even a "call" which uses the phrase הלך אַחֲרֵי (1 Ki. 19:21). But on a closer look at these relationships, several characteristics stand out. First, the "disciple" seems to be more of a servant or assistant than a devoted follower.[50] Joshua, for instance, is explicitly called the servant of Moses, and aids Moses in his duties (Ex.

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[47] Helmeyer, 397.

[48] Other references to "walking in the way of the Lord" are Jdgs. 2:22, 1 Ki. 2:3, 3:14, 11:33, 38.

[49] Of Joshua and Moses, *Antiq*. 6.84; of Elisha and Elijah, *Antiq*. 8.354, 9.28, 33; of Baruch and Jeremiah, *Antiq*. 10.158, 178 (Wilkins, 62). In addition to these three specific relationships, Wilkins notes that there are other more "structured" learning relationships within the OT, including groups of prophets (such as the group mentioned by Samuel in 1 Sam. 10:5-10, or of the "sons of the prophets" who speak to Elisha in 2 Ki. 2:3, 5, 7, and 15), the wise teacher and his pupils, and also scribes (Wilkins, 64-65).

[50] Ibid., 62.

24:13).[51] In the call of Elisha, the verse notes that Elisha "follows after" Elijah, but also that he becomes his servant or assistant. Secondly, all three of these men are attached to their "master" specifically because they are in training to take over his position.[52] And finally, and perhaps most importantly, the emphasis is not primarily on the "master," nor is he the focus: God is.[53] Rengstorf points out that although Moses writes the Pentateuch, leads the exodus, and sees God's face, he is never venerated as a hero in the OT.[54] God always has the primary focus. In Israel, leaders were in the employ of God himself, and were appointed to positions of leadership specifically to mediate the covenant relationship of God to his people.[55] Therefore, these "discipleship" relationships should not be seen as a normative paradigm in the OT, but rather, as relationships which had as their primary purpose training for service to God's people.[56]

In this overview of discipleship within the OT, it has been clear that the discipleship of God's people by God himself is not only present in the OT, but is its very foundation. Yahweh continually covenants with Israel by initiating relationship, which in turn has life-implications for them. The "walking" imagery which runs throughout the OT – very similar to the language of Mk. 8:34 – is one of the primary ways in which this relationship is described. In addition, it is very clear throughout the OT that God's people can only follow after one God. Complete and exclusive allegiance is required within the

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[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid., 63.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Karl Heinrich Rengstorf, "μαθητής," in *TDNT*, 3:430.

[55] Avery Dulles, "Discipleship" in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 4:361.

[56] Wilkins, 66.

covenant discipleship relationship of God with his people. The centerpiece of the OT – God's gracious covenant relationship with his people – is spoken of in discipleship-like language throughout the OT, a language which we must be aware of in looking at Jesus' call to "follow" him.

**Greco-Roman View of Discipleship**

The word μαθητής first appears in the Greek language in the writings of Herodotus in the fifth century B.C., although his use of it implies that the word was already known to his readers.[57] In the Classical period, the word had a range of meaning, from a simple learner or apprentice, to a pupil or academician, to a disciple or adherent. When used of an apprentice or learner, the word simply meant that one person was a disciple of another in order to gain a skill; the focus is on the discipline being learned.[58] For example, Plato speaks of the μαθητής of a doctor or a flute-player, each learning the skill from a more experienced teacher.[59] The term could go a step further to the idea of a pupil, meaning that the μαθητής attached himself to a certain teacher not just to gain a skill, but to gain it from that particular teacher.[60] This is the way in which it was used of the followers of Pythagoras, Socrates, and Isocrates. Socrates disliked the term because it was used by Sophists, whose practices of charging for instruction he thoroughly despised.[61] Indeed, because of this fee-charging structure which the Sophists had set up, the term retained for them the force of *pupil* rather than the closer connection of

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[57] Ibid., 72.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Rengstorf, 416.

[60] Wilkins, 73.

[61] Rengstorf, 417.

adherent.[62] Finally, μαθητής could be used in reference to a person whom had committed himself to a master not only with the goal of learning from him, but also of imitating this master.[63] Herodotus speaks of a man who, although Scythian, loved the Greek way of life so much that he continued to live out Greek customs (as a μαθητής of this culture) when he returned home to Scythia.[64] The μαθηταὶ of the Spartans were also spoken of this way – their speech and way of life reflected the Spartan mindset.[65]

The term could also be used with religious overtones. As mentioned above, the μαθηταὶ of Pythagoras were particularly interested in Pythagoras himself as a teacher. But this was not just to learn from him; indeed, Pythagoras seemed to have so captured the minds of his listeners that after coming to hear him, they sometimes would decide to stay with him rather than return home.[66] They even saw him as somewhat connected to the divine, and hoped for miraculous healing from him.[67] Similarly, Apollonius of Tyana in the first century A.D. was said to have disciples who not only held to his teaching but also considered him semi-divine.[68] Although neither of these men started religions, their disciples clearly viewed and followed them as more than mere pupils, and as disciples of a master whom they considered to be more than a man.

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[62] Ibid., 418.

[63] Wilkins, 75.

[64] Ibid., 74.

[65] Ibid., 75.

[66] Martin Hengel, *The Charismatic Leader and his Followers* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 25.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Rengstorf, 422.

The predominant use of the word by the time of the NT was in the realm of the master-disciple type relationship, although μαθητής could still be used either of an apprentice or a pupil.[69] What was meant by the term μαθητής depended on who the master was and what kind of relationship he had with his μαθητής.[70] For example, Dio Chrysostom speaks of μαθηταὶ of the gods or of other religious leaders, called such because they have the same characteristics of the gods they follow.[71] Plutarch uses the term to refer to followers of many well-known and venerated leaders, noting that the μαθηταὶ of Linus, a poet and singer, could be identified because they imitated his traits and mannerisms.[72] A person could be a μαθητής of a dead person's ideas and philosophies, of a god, or of a living person and their practices.[73] What would generally be understood by the term μαθητής by the time of the NT would be "a committed follower of a significant master."[74] Commitment to and imitation in some way of the master were common themes of discipleship, but the type of master and his relationship to the disciple could vary greatly.[75]

**Disciples in Judaism**

Although the Rabbis had disciples (תַּלְמִידִים) in their schools, it was not until after the time of Jesus that these Rabbinical schools arose and flourished as a common part of

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[69] Wilkins, 76.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid., 77.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Ibid., 76.

[74] Ibid.77.

[75] Ibid., 78.

the Jewish community. The concept of a "disciple" or "follower" certainly did exist for the first century A.D. Jew, but the models of discipleship were as varied as first-century Judaism.[76] Thus, there was no set understanding for what a "follower" or "disciple" was; indeed, most concepts of following/discipleship existed on the fringe movements of the Jewish society, and not as a part of every day life.[77] We will look at two general areas of "discipleship" which existed in first-century Judaism: disciples of a Messianic or zealot-type figure, and the groups of disciples which are mentioned in the NT itself.

During the first century A.D., those who longed to set Israel free from Roman rule sometimes united as disciples under a messianic-type figure, one whom they hoped would bring them political victory over the Romans.[78] There was a paradigm for revolt and such a following in the minds of these Zealots in the Maccabbean revolt. In 1 Macc. 2:27ff, Mattathias calls those faithful to the ways of Yahweh to "follow after me" (ἐξερχομαι + ὀπίσω) and flees into the mountains to begin the rebellion against the Greeks.[79] Similarly, Josephus gives an account of two figures – the Egyptian and Theudas – whose adherents literally followed them out into the wilderness to await a messianic prophet and miracles.[80]

But apart from the disciples of these messianic-types, there are also several groups of disciples mentioned in the NT itself. The disciples of John the Baptist are mentioned several times in the gospels, including at the beginning of Jesus' ministry (Jn.

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[76] Ibid., 81.

[77] Hengel, *The Charismatic Leader and his Followers*, 34.

[78] Wilkins, 92.

[79] Hengel, *The Charismatic Leader and his Followers*, 19.

[80] Ibid., 21.

1:35-37), in reference to purification and baptism (Jn. 3:25-26), fasting (Mt. 9:14, Mk. 2:18, Lk. 5:33), and also as sent by John to ask Jesus who he is (Mt. 11:2-3, Lk. 7:18-19). It also seems that John had taught them a prayer (Lk. 11:1). They are also mentioned as burying John's body after his beheading (Mk. 6:29). There is no reference to how they became his disciples, or as to what sort of relationship they had with him.[81] However, they do seem to be learning a certain way of life from John (fasting and being taught how to pray), as well as keeping company with him on a regular basis (such as when Andrew is with him as John proclaims that Jesus is the Lamb of God), and attending him in some way when he is in prison (so that they are available to take messages back and forth between Jesus and John). Also mentioned are the disciples of Moses and the disciples of the Pharisees. The "disciples of Moses" are only referred to in Jn. 9:18ff, in which the Pharisees claim to be "disciples of Moses" rather than disciples of Jesus. As the Pharisees use this phrase in the context of Jesus having healed on the Sabbath, and of "hurling insults" at the healed blind man who tells them of Jesus' miracle, it seems that the "disciples of Moses" are not an actual category of disciples, but a claim that the Pharisees make in order to oppose and thus reject Jesus. They claim to be disciples of Moses because Moses was an authorized spokesperson of God, whereas this Jesus, by comparison, is a no one, and not to be acknowledged (Jn. 9:27-29). Finally, the disciples of the Pharisees are mentioned in Mt. 22:15-16 and Mk. 2:18, as well as by Josephus. In Josephus, the Pharisees' disciples could be those influenced by or committed to Pharisaical teaching as a whole, or to one particular Pharisee.[82] They are a group which is

[81] Ibid., 35.

[82] Wilkins, 84.

known by the general populace (as it is a crowd which inquires about the differences between Jesus' and the Pharisees' disciples in Mk. 2:18), and they are also in some way representative of the Pharisees, being sent by them in Mt. 22:15-16 to question Jesus.

It can be seen from this brief overview that the concept of "disciple" or follower in first-century A.D. Judaism, although probably somewhat familiar, did not have clearly delineated parameters. An organization or a person could have disciples, and the literal following (or constant accompaniment) of the master-figure could be part of the discipleship relationship. Similar to the Greco-Roman concept of discipleship, one could be a disciple of a dead person (such as the Pharisees' use of the phrase in reference to Moses), a cultic-type leader (such as the Zealots and the Messianic movements), a religious figure such as John the Baptist, or a religious institution such as the Pharisees. M. J. Wilkins notes that even though they do not use the terminology of discipleship, the Essene community at Qumran could also be considered a discipleship-like community, requiring a certain way of life with the purpose of devotion to God.[83] Indeed, each of these Jewish expressions of discipleship lies within the religious sphere. The Zealots, the Essenes, the Messiah-followers, and the disciples of the Pharisees and John the Baptist all were disciples of a movement or person whom they felt was seeking to faithfully follow God's purposes for Israel. Thus, even within the cultural development of "disciples" as more common place in first-century Judaism than in the OT, the OT's view of discipleship still remains within Judaism – any discipleship is in service of and related to ultimately following God alone. However, while somewhat familiar, the concept of being a disciple or follower – along with a general idea of what this could entail – could still

[83] Ibid., 88.

vary in expression and type, would not have had specific characteristics to the first-century Jewish ear.

**Jesus and Discipleship in Mark**

In what ways, then, does Jesus' discipleship conform to and differ from the paradigms of discipleship in the first century? There are certainly some similarities to the cultural understanding of discipleship discussed above, and Jesus' discipleship would initially seem familiar to its original hearers. He is a significant master with committed followers, followers who adhere to his teaching and even physically accompany and literally "follow" him where he goes.[84] Additionally, there is an element of imitation, as they even seem to do the things that he does at times (such as when they are sent out to heal the sick and cast out demons in Lk. 10:1-11), or when Jesus tells them they must imitate his attitude of servanthood (Mk. 10:42-45).

However, Jesus' discipleship also has some radical differences from first-century expectations. Unlike the common practice, Jesus is the one who initiates the discipleship relationship with his disciples. Whereas other masters were sought out by disciples whose following was "voluntary," it is consistently Jesus who authoritatively calls and invites people into discipleship with him.[85] This is far more consistent with the divine initiative and human response of the covenant formula in the OT than it is to common practices of first-century discipleship. Secondly, it is not study of the Torah, philosophy, or being part of a political or religious movement that Jesus offers, but himself; his invitation is

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[84] See Mk. 6:1, 10:32.

[85] Wilkins, 107. Schweizer, Rengstorf and Müller also note this difference in Jesus' form of discipleship; see: Dietrich Müller, "Disciple, μαθητής," in *NIDNTT*, 1:488; Rengstorf, 444. Eduard Schweizer, *Lordship and Discipleship,* (London: SCM Press, 1960), 13.

devotion to himself alone.[86] The call narratives of Mark make this clear – in each one, Jesus simply says, "Follow *me*."[87] Especially in light of the OT context of sole devotion to Yahweh, this is astounding. Third, Jesus' followers have no goal of becoming masters themselves. Unlike the discipleship common in the first century, Jesus' disciples were not in training to become masters themselves, or to one day take on disciples in the same manner that Jesus did.[88] Although Jesus instructs them to imitate his attitude of servanthood, their goal is to be *like* their master, not to become masters themselves (see Mk. 10:35-45). Fourth, and perhaps most striking of all, is the exclusive nature of Jesus' call to discipleship. Jesus consistently requires his followers to be committed to him and him alone, without having their allegiance divided between other things. This goes down even to disowning allegiance to self (as discussed in the section on the meaning of to "deny himself" below), and anything else that might distract, including family relationships (Lk. 14:26) or possessions (Mk. 10:17-31). However, the sacrifice which Jesus requires is not simply for the sake of sacrifice; it is sacrifice for the purpose of full allegiance to Christ. In *Lordship and Discipleship*, Eduard Schweizer claims that response to Jesus' call to discipleship necessarily "entails forsaking old ties,"[89] and while this does seem to be true, those ties are not the same for every person. They are uniquely suited to each person's temptations. Thus, for example, Jesus specifically addresses the rich man's ties to his possessions (Mk. 10:17-31), but elsewhere, he tells those who

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[86] Rengstorf, 447.

[87] This call is found in 1:17, 20, 2:14, 8:34, and 10:21.

[88] Schweizer, 21. What is meant concerning the disciples' lack of goal to become masters does not mean that they did not mentor or lead others, but simply that as in other first century A.D. paradigms, they did not become disciples in order to become a master *who was no longer a disciple* of the master Jesus.

[89] Schweizer, 13.

would follow him to return to their homes and families.[90] Jesus' call to discipleship is an exclusive one which requires sacrifice of other things which might intrude on devotion to Christ, but sacrifice and severing ties are not ends in themselves. Instead, sacrifice is done to exclude that which might hinder devotion and allegiance, not to simply exclude the things that are forsaken.

Thus, Jesus' form of discipleship has both similarities and dissimilarities to the discipleship paradigms of the first century A.D. The similarities are more in form than content, however. The unique features of Jesus' discipleship – his initiation of the relationship, his authoritative call to himself instead of to a philosophy or agenda, his followers' imitation of him without aspiring towards becoming masters themselves, and the exclusive allegiance which he demands of each disciple – all cause his discipleship to stand out radically. The original hearers of Jesus' call in Mk. 8:34 thus would have recognized that Jesus' words had to do with creating some sort of a discipleship relationship, with him as the master. When they heard, "Follow me," they would have recognized an invitation to a discipleship relationship, but they also would have been surprised (if not shocked, within a Jewish context) at Jesus' authority and audacity to call to such following. Only someone claiming the kind of allegiance that God alone should be given would speak as Jesus did.

**The Meaning of "Following" in Mark**

We have seen that Jesus' discipleship differed significantly in character from what might have been expected by a first century Jew or Greek. But what does the term

[90] In Mk. 5:18, Jesus tells the healed demoniac to return to his home and tell what God has done for him. He tells others who he heals that they may go, while still referencing their faith in him (Mk. 5:34, 10:52). Joseph of Arimathea, also referenced as a disciple of Christ, does not seem to either follow him around the country or to have given up his wealth (Mt. 27:57, Mk. 15:43).

"following" mean in the gospel of Mark? When Jesus says, "Follow me," what does he immediately have in mind – a literal following, or a figurative one? A brief look at the uses of ἀκολουθέω in Mark will help us clarify this.

Ἀκολουθέω is used in Mark in several ways. It can be used in a strictly literal sense of following someone from point A to point B, such as when Jesus tells his disciples to follow a certain man in Jerusalem in order to prepare for the Last Supper (14:13), or of Peter's following Jesus at a distance when he is arrested (14:52). It is also used of the "great crowd" which follows Jesus about (3:7, 5:24), and of the crowd which accompanies him into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (11:9). Once it is used with the specific nuance of to "accompany," when Jesus speaks of the signs which will follow (accompany) those who believe in him (16:17). It is also used in the explicit calls to discipleship which Jesus makes in Mark (1:18, 2:14, 8:34, 10:21, 28), three times with the same language of "Follow me" (ἀκολουθείτω μοι).[91] These two categories are fairly clear – in the first, the following is very literal. In the second, the following clearly has deeper implications (committed discipleship relationship) than a literal following.

However, it is also used in several instances of Jesus' disciples without clear definition of whether the following is significant or not. The disciple John reports to Jesus that someone was casting out demons who wasn't "following us," or wasn't a part of the group of disciples (9:38). Did John mean here that this person hadn't been following Jesus about the country, or wasn't a known adherent to Jesus, or something in between? The confusion continues with several other uses. In 6:1 and 10:32, Jesus' disciples follow him on journeys, first to his hometown, and then to Jerusalem. Schweizer

[91] Jesus uses the call of "ἀκολουθείτω μοι" in 2:14 (call of Levi), 8:34, and 10:21 (the rich man).

claims that especially in Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, he leads the way as a master, and his disciples follow behind not just in position on the road but as followers going after their leader.[92] Bartimaeus, after being healed from his blindness, leaves his home in Jericho and follows Jesus on his way to Jerusalem (10:52). And finally, the women at the crucifixion are described as those who "followed and ministered" to Jesus while he was in Galilee (15:41). Jack Dean Kingsbury notes that in Matthew, the use of ἀκολουθέω can be determined by the presence or absence of "cost" and "commitment" on the part of the follower within the context.[93] This certainly holds true for Mark in the call passages. A clear commitment (or lack of commitment) is made by the disciple, with an idea of the cost that such commitment will require. However, when the more ambiguous passages above mention Jesus' disciples (those who presumably have made a commitment and realized the cost already), one of their primary activities is to literally follow Jesus about the country. It is one of their most obvious characteristics a great deal of the time, and even an identifying feature in some cases (as in 9:38 and 15:41). Even in the call narratives, the literal nature of "follow" is plain – the fishermen leave their nets and go with Jesus (1:17-20), Levi leaves his booth, and the rich man in Mk. 10 also is invited to go with Jesus after selling his possessions. Ἀκολουθέω, even when used to mean more than simply following from point A to point B, still retains a "semi-literal sense" of literal following in Mark.[94]

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[92] Schweizer, 15.

[93] Jack Dean Kingsbury, "The Verb *Akolouthein* ("To Follow") as an Index of Matthew's View of his Community," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 97, no. 1 (March 1978): 58.

[94] Christian Bledinger, "ἀκολουθέω," in *NIDNTT*, 1:482.

It is here that we may note a helpful suggestion from Kittel. He explains the difference between the crowds who follow Jesus literally and the following of Jesus' disciples by using the language of "external" following. Thus, those who follow Jesus without commitment (the crowds) are just following him externally, whereas his disciples follow him externally *because* they have a heart-orientation of following Jesus: they also follow him internally.[95] The reason that the following-feature of the disciples cannot be spliced apart into a metaphorical and literal understanding is precisely because their external following is a product of their internal following; the two are necessarily linked. This lies squarely in line with another major emphasis of Jesus' teaching in Mark's gospel – the defilement of the heart, and the importance of what is inside of a person.[96] Thus, ἀκολουθέω is used in Mark of both external following alone and of external following which arises from an internal commitment of person to Christ. It is this internal commitment which Christ is asking for when he calls a person, and not the external following alone.

The external-internal following of Christ may also explain why the usage of ἀκολουθέω and "disciple" begins to drop out of NT language after the gospels and Acts. Ἀκολουθέω is used to refer to following Christ only once outside of the gospels, in Rev. 14:4; it seems that the verb is reserved for reference almost entirely to the incarnate Jesus on earth precisely because it has a consistently external sense.[97] And yet, this does not seem to be a problem for the other NT writers. The usage of ἀκολουθέω in the gospel of John begins to anticipate this shift with more obviously internal uses of the verb. In Jn.

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[95] Gerhard Kittel, "ἀκολουθέω," in *TDNT*, 1:213-214.

[96] Bayer, 109-112.

[97] Dulles, 362.

10:27, Jesus speaks of his sheep following his voice, which necessarily pulls the usage away from a "literal" category. In Jn. 21:19-22, he uses the command "follow me" not to initiate a discipleship relationship with Peter but to call him to internal faithfulness to Christ.[98] The book of Acts continues this shift. Luke refers to Christians as both "believers" (2:44, 4:32) and "disciples" (6:1, 2, 7, 9:10, 19b, 26, 38, and elsewhere). Paul, of course, takes up this language of the believing ones, or those who believe, throughout his letters,[99] and also speaks often of the imitation of Christ by believers.[100] Thus, after the ascension of Christ, ἀκολουθέω is no longer used to describe the believer's life with Christ, as ἀκολουθέω bears with it the external and internal concepts of following. The internal following of Christ begins to be spoken of as belief and imitation by the NT writers, echoing in many ways the language of following God in the OT.

**Conclusion**

Jesus' use of "follow me" in Mk. 8:34 can now be more fully understood. Jesus was inviting those listening to be his disciples, a concept which would have been initially recognized by his listeners and by Mark's readers. But different from the discipleship concepts of his day, Jesus initiated the call, called people to himself specifically, and required total allegiance. Those who did respond to his call often did physically follow him, but their external following pointed to the internal following – the internal commitment – to Jesus himself. Those who came to believe in Christ after his ascension

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[98] I am indebted to Rengstorf for bringing my attention to the more "metaphorical" usage of ἀκολουθέω in John. He does not reference 10:27 or 21:19-22, but he does discuss several other passages in John as helpful in connecting the idea of "following Jesus" to the NT after the gospels and Acts (see Rengstorf, 458).

[99] See, for example, 1 Cor. 1:21, Gal. 3:22.

[100] See, for example, Phil. 2:1-11.

continued on in internal commitment, expressed not through external following of Christ but in imitation of him. Just as the OT people of God responded to God's invitation to covenant relationship by following God and walking in his ways, the NT people of God, too, respond as disciples and believers in Jesus, walking in his ways (imitation) and following him from the heart. This, then, is what the call to discipleship means for believers today, as well. To "follow me" in the twenty-first century is to commit ourselves with full and sole allegiance to Christ alone, externally living out what we have internally embraced.

## Chapter 3

## Concept Studies in Mark 8:34

In this chapter, two concepts within Jesus' call to discipleship in Mk. 8:34 will be addressed. First, we will look in-depth at the meaning of "self-denial" through a word study on ἀπαρνέομαι, noting its implications for the interpretation of Mk. 8:34. Second, we will examine "cross-bearing" in first-century Palestine, seeking to gain an understanding of what it meant to "bear a cross" to the original hearers of this call. A discussion of why Jesus included this in a call to discipleship is also given, as well as how to understand this reference to cross-bearing in relationship to Jesus' cross and crucifixion. At the end of the chapter, these two concepts will be brought together in order to clarify the nature of discipleship in Mk. 8:34.

### The Meaning of "Deny Himself:" a Word Study on ἀπαρνέομαι

The word usually translated "deny" here in Mk. 8:34 is ἀπαρνέομαι in the Greek. Used eleven times in the New Testament, it only appears in the synoptic gospels. However, it is synonymous with the verb ἀρνέομαι, which is used much more frequently throughout the New Testament.[101] The two words' identical meaning can be seen in the following ways. First, all three synoptic writers use both verbs to refer to Peter's denial (ἀπαρνέομαι being used in Mt. 26:34-35, 75; Mk. 14:30-31, 72; Lk. 22:34, 61, and ἀρνέομαι in Mt. 26:70, 72; Mk. 14:68, 70; Lk. 22:57). Second, Luke uses the two words

[101] Heinrich Schlier, "ἀρνέομαι," in *TDNT*, 1:471, and Wolfgang Schenk, "ἀρνέομαι," in *EDNT*, 1:154.

interchangeably within the same sentence: "Whoever denies (ἀρνέομαι) me before men will be denied (ἀπαρνέομαι) before the angels of God." And finally, whereas Mk. 8:34 uses ἀπαρνέομαι, Lk. 9:23, its parallel passage, uses ἀρνέομαι. Because of their synonymous usage in the New Testament, the words will be treated as one for the purposes of this word study. However, I will note the instances in which ἀπαρνέομαι is used, as it functions with only one particular nuance which ἀρνέομαι can carry.

We will begin by looking at the usage of ἀρνέομαι outside of the NT, where it is used in a variety of ways. In classical Greek, ἀρνέομαι could have a range of meanings, including "to deny consent, to refuse, to protest, sometimes to revolt."[102] Ἀπαρνέομαι is used once in the Septuagint in Is. 31:7, and ἀρνέομαι is used six times: Gen. 18:15, three times in the Wisdom of Solomon, and twice in 4 Maccabees. The uses in Is. 31:7 and Gen. 18:15 translate the verbs מאס, meaning to reject, refuse, or despise,[103] and כחשׁ (to deceive),[104] respectively. As these two verbs are usually brought across by different Greek verbs in the Septuagint, neither of these instances sheds particular light on a regular usage of ἀρνέομαι/ἀπαρνέομαι.[105] Two of the Wisdom of Solomon references, along with the 4 Maccabees references, however, give a bit more coherent usage of the word. In the Wisdom of Solomon, two of the references are paired with the infinitive of "to know" from οἶδά, in 12:27 referring to denying to know God, and in 16:16 with the accusative object "you." In 4 Macc. 8:7 and 10:15, it has the sense of to renounce or

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[102] Hans-Georg Link and Erich Tiedtke, "Deny," in *NIDNTT*, 1:455.

[103] BDB, s.v. "מאס"

[104] BDB, s.v. "כחשׁ"

[105] כחשׁ is usually translated by ψεύδομαι ("to lie") in the Septuagint, while מאס is usually brought across in the Septuagint by ἐξουθενόω, which means to disdain or to reject disdainfully (BDAG, s.v. "ἐξουθενόω").

disown (as in disassociate and reject).[106] In Hellenistic literature in particular, ἀρνέομαι came to have this meaning of disowning or renouncing.[107] However, it is used elsewhere in first-century A.D. literature to speak of denying the truth of a statement or of refusing to commit an action.[108] As can be seen, a survey of sources outside of the New Testament simply shows the variety of usage of the word. Because of this, we will turn to the NT, cataloguing the meanings of ἀρνέομαι for the biblical writers.

What follows is a categorization of each use of ἀρνέομαι in the NT. BDAG lists four nuances which ἀρνέομαι can have in the NT: 1) to refuse consent to something, 2) to state that something is not true, or to "deny" its truth, 3) to disclaim association with a person or event, and 4) to refuse to pay any attention to, or to "disregard, renounce."[109] Although BDAG lists these four nuances for ἀρνέομαι, we will see that this can be further simplified down to two general meanings: 1) to deny that something is true, or 2) to disown or renounce connection with something (usually a some*one*). With both of these uses, there is almost always a personal dimension to the denial. As will be shown, even the instances in which a denial of the truth of a statement is made, there are overtones of association or connection to a person. In the New Testament, the force of ἀρνέομαι is primarily about personal relationship.[110]

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[106] Link and Tiedtke, 455. The two 4 Maccabees references occur within the contexts of an enemy's demand that a captured person renounce their allegiances.

[107] Ibid., 454.

[108] Ceslas Spicq, "ἀρνέομαι," in *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, 1: 201. In a letter in 6 B.C., Gallus the governor of the province of Asia uses ἀρνέομαι to describe a slave's denial that he is a responsible for a criminal act, and in *War* Josephus used it to describe Pilate refusing to take down the standards from Jerusalem.

[109] BDAG, s.v. "ἀρνέομαι"

[110] Schlier, 469.

We will begin with an examination of the instances in which ἀρνέομαι is used to deny the truth of a claim. The uses of ἀρνέομαι in this category can be further divided into two subcategories. First, there are a few instances in which it is used to simply deny the truth of a reality or event. In Lk. 8:45, Jesus feels a sick woman touch his garment while he is in a crowd. When he asks who did it, everyone "denies" having done it. John uses it in Jn. 1:20 to speak of John the Baptist's attitude towards Jesus: John "confessed and did not deny, but confessed that, 'I am not the Christ.'" In other words, he told the truth regarding who he was. The word is used once more this way in Acts 4:16, in which the Sanhedrin notes that they are not able to "deny" that Peter and John really have healed a lame man. In these three instances, the word is used with reference to affirming or denying the truth of a statement or the reality of an event's occurrence. These are the only three uses of ἀρνέομαι in which there is no connotation of personal disassociation.

The other use of ἀρνέομαι in this category is devoted to the gospel writers' use of it in reference to Peter's denial of knowing Christ. In each instance, the writers use the verb to describe Peter's denial – not as a renunciation or disowning of Christ himself, but as the denial of having known him or having been one of his disciples (Mk. 14:70, Jn. 18:25), of having been with him (Mt. 26:70, 72, Mk. 14:68, Lk. 22:57, Jn. 18:27), or of not knowing Jesus at all (Mt. 26:72, Lk. 22:57). Each time, he is responding to a statement made about him or to him. But as is obvious from Peter's denial of knowing Jesus, he is actually disassociating himself from him, and is *de facto* renouncing any relationship with Jesus. Therefore, apart from the first three instances mentioned above (Lk. 8:45, Jn. 1:20, Acts 4:16), even when ἀρνέομαι is used in the NT to challenge the

truth of a statement, it has to do with the renunciation of an allegiance to or association with a person.

The more prevalent use of ἀρνέομαι, however, has to do with direct disowning or renouncing something, usually a person. Most of the uses of ἀρνέομαι in the gospels fall within this category, and all the uses of ἀπαρνέομαι lie here. It becomes clear that the gloss of "disowning" is to be preferred in these instances, as the direct object which ἀρνέομαι takes, or is implied, are exclusively persons in these contexts. In the eleven New Testament uses of ἀπαρνέομαι, each one except for Lk. 12:9 takes a pronoun – either personal or reflexive – as its object. Mt. 16:24, like Mk. 8:34, takes ἑαυτὸν ("himself") as the object, while the passages which record Jesus' prediction of Peter's denial and Peter's remembrance of Jesus' prediction all take either με (me) or σε (you) as the object.[111] The final use of ἀπαρνέομαι in Lk. 12:9, although without a personal pronoun as its object, makes it clear that a person is implied.[112] The remaining uses of ἀρνέομαι in the gospels also take persons as direct objects.[113] Outside the gospels, 2 Tim. 2:12, 13, Tit. 1:16, 2 Pet. 2:1, 1 Jn. 2:22, 23, and Jud. 1:4 also all speak of disowning particular people, although the reference to a person is not always the direct object of the verb. In addition to these references, there are three usages in Acts which have an even more pointed sense of disowning a person. Acts 3:13 and 14 refer to the Sanhedrin's having "denied" Jesus, and in Acts 7:35, Stephen refers to the Israelites'

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[111] Mt. 26:34, 35, 75, Mk. 14:30, 31, 72 and Lk. 22:34, 61.

[112] Lk. 12:9 reads, "Whoever denies (ἀρνέομαι) me before men will be denied (ἀπαρνέομαι) before the angels of God." The implication is: whoever denies me, I will deny him. Additionally, the parallel passage in Mt. 10:33 makes this implication explicit, using a personal pronoun as the object of both uses of the verb in this verse.

[113] Lk. 9:23, the parallel to Mk. 8:34 and Mt. 16:24, also takes ἑαυτὸν as its object, while Lk. 12:9 and Jn. 13:38 both refer to disowning Jesus.

having "denied" Moses by questioning what authority he had over them. In these instances, it seems that the intent of the disowners was not just to disassociate, but to totally reject. However, these references in Acts still lie within the greater definition of ἀρνέομαι as intentional disassociation from relationship with a particular person.

There are also several instances in which ἀρνέομαι takes a thing instead of a person as its object. However, these usages still carry the sense of "to disown" a particular person, either because of the close association between the object denied and a person, or because of the context of the usage. We will first address the instances in which the object denied has a close association with a person. In 1 Tim. 5:8, Paul speaks of those who by their actions "deny" the faith. Heb. 11:24 describes Moses' "denying" to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. It is used twice in Revelation this way – once to refer to the church of Pergamum's refusal to "deny" faith in Christ (2:13), and once to refer to the church of Philadelphia's refusal to "deny" Christ's name (3:8). In 1 Tim. 5:8, Rev. 2:13, and Rev. 3:8, the objects of faith, "faith in Christ," or "Christ's name" are things so closely associated with Christ himself that they functionally mean denying the person himself.[114] Thus, 1 Tim. 5:8, Rev. 2:13 and Rev. 3:8 can be understood as disowning a particular person – Jesus – even though the person of Jesus is not the object of the verb. This is even further supported by the actions with which "denying" is contrasted in the Revelation passages.[115] In Rev. 2:13, instead of "denying" the faith, the church has "held fast" (κρατέω), and in 3:8, has "kept my word" (τηρέω). These are both verbs which imply closeness, even clinging, to Jesus and faith in him. Thus in these

[114] Schlier, 470.

[115] Link and Tiedtke, 455.

passages, ἀρνέομαι even more clearly has a gloss of disassociation or disowning. Heb. 11:24 should also be put in the category of disowning, as Moses' refusal to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter can be understood as an intentional disassociation from a particular person (Pharaoh himself).

There are also two references in which the object of ἀρνέομαι is a thing rather than a person, but which lie in a context which clearly still denote allegiance. In 2 Tim. 3:5 it is used of those who appear godly, but "deny" the power of godliness. This is a description of the wicked, of those who appear to be followers of God, but in reality, are followers of pleasure. Thus, they are not truly aligned with God and his ways, but their own. In their hearts, they have disowned him. The context of Titus 2:12 is quite different. Paul gives a call to "deny" ungodliness and worldly passions, and instead to live a self-controlled life. In speaking of denying wickedness in favor of righteousness, Paul encourages moving away from ungodly living and towards the godly life. Similar to 2 Tim. 3:5, it has to do with disowning or rejecting one thing in favor of another. Additionally, like 2 Tim. 3:5 (but perhaps less clearly), there is an implication of becoming aligned with God's ways. Both of these references have specifically to do with disowning things, not people, and should not be added to the category of denying persons as 1 Tim. 5:8 and the Revelation references have been. However, they both also retain the gloss of "disown" because of their contexts. These two passages form a subset of the "disown" meaning of ἀρνέομαι, but still fit within it.

From this biblical survey of ἀρνέομαι, several conclusions about the word and its New Testament usage can be made. First, the original premise that there are two general meanings of ἀρνέομαι in the biblical text is upheld. It can mean either to deny the truth

of a statement, or to disown association with something – almost always a person. Even in contexts in which it is used to refute the truth of a statement, ἀρνέομαι often has implications of having disowned association with a particular person, and when it is used to disown association with an object, the vast majority of uses also have implications of disowning a person. Moreover, when a person is the object of the verb, as is the case in Mk. 8:34, it always has the connotation of disowning association or connection with that particular person. Disowning a person "refers to the dissolution of this bond by direct or indirect means,"[116] and so has mainly to do with the breaking of a relationship. Thus, the main emphasis of ἀρνέομαι in the New Testament "relates primarily to a person,"[117] and to dissolving connection with that person.

Second, it can be seen that the relational disassociation emphasis of ἀρνέομαι implies disassociation of a particular kind. The disowning indicates that a previous relationship with the disowned existed. There is a "change in relationship"[118] which happens with the disassociation, one which moves away from a previously established "relationship of obedience and fidelity."[119] This is especially clear in Peter's denials of Jesus,[120] but is also indicated in both Revelation references, as well as Mt. 10:33, Lk. 12:9, and 2 Tim. 2:12, 13. Disassociation cannot take place unless there was first a bond of association; "it can take place only where there has first been acknowledgement and

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[116] Schenk, 153.

[117] Schlier, 469.

[118] Schenk, 153.

[119] Schlier, 470.

[120] Link and Tiedtke, 455.

commitment."[121] Additionally, the disassociation always has a public component to it. It can be an inward heart attitude as in Rev. 2:13 and 3:8, but is much more often acted out: from *de facto* disowning by conduct (as in 1 Tim. 5:8 and Tit. 1:16), to verbal public disassociation (Peter's denials), to outright rejection (Acts 3:13-14 and 2 Tim. 2:12). And even in the more private disassociations, there is a correlation between the inner orientation of association (as the churches in Revelation are commended for being faithful) and the lives which they have accordingly adopted, holding fast and keeping the word.[122] Thus, the New Testament usage of ἀρνέομαι is "to voluntarily forsake a person to whom one has been attached,"[123] affecting not only the heart-orientation towards that person, but necessarily also the public association with him. It is the noticeable severing of a committed connection to a person.

A further note may be made on 2 Tim. 2:13. This is the only other passage besides Mk. 8:34 (and its parallel synoptic passages) in which ἑαυτὸν is the object of ἀρνέομαι. 2 Tim. 2:12b-13 reads literally, "If we disown, then he will also disown us; if we are faithless, then he will remain faithful, for he is not able to disown himself." In v. 12, ἀρνέομαι references God's disassociation from those who disassociate from him. However, in v. 13, Paul writes that even if his people are faithless, God cannot be so, because for God to be faithless would be to disown himself. This would imply that

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[121] Schlier, 470.

[122] Spicq talks about the uses of ἀρνέομαι in Rev. 2:13, 3:8 as public spoken denial (200), while Link and Tiedtke talk about them as being of the heart (455).

[123] Spicq, 202.

although God can disassociate from others, disassociation from himself is not possible, perhaps because to do so would be to "cease to be [him]self."[124]

How might this affect our interpretation of Mk. 8:34? Is the implication that disowning of one's own self means to cease to be oneself, to go contrary to one's own nature, to actually suppress and rid a person of himself? Disowning an already-established intentional relationship with another person – as ἀρνέομαι is most often used in the New Testament – is understandable. But in 2 Tim. 2:13, it seems that disowning one's self is not possible, or at least, is to disown one's very fundamental nature. Can this be what the meaning is in Mk. 8:34? There are those who would interpret it this way, claiming it means to "treat oneself as a negligible quantity that should never enter into consideration, to suppress oneself, in a way."[125] Should Jesus' call to "deny oneself" be understood as a suppression of self, or can the idea of ceasing to be oneself hold a different meaning for the disciple of Christ?

Despite the light which 2 Tim. 2:13 can shed on denying one's own self versus another person, it would be unhelpful to take 2 Tim. 2:13 as a paradigm for Mk. 8:34. Ἀρνέομαι is used in the New Testament primarily to address the concept of allegiance – of whom one has chosen to associate with or disconnect from. Whereas God cannot (and should not) separate from himself, a disciple of Christ is required to give his or her allegiance to Jesus alone, and not to his or her own self. This greater New Testament context and usage of allegiance must still be taken into account when reading Mk. 8:34.

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[124] Schlier, 471.

[125] Spicq, 204.

While 2 Tim. 2:13 shares a similar grammar, it is not the only interpretive context, and is particular to God himself; its similarities to Mk. 8:34 should not be overstressed.

In light of this word study, it can be concluded that the meaning of ἀπαρνέομαι in Mk. 8:34 is to disown the previously-established allegiance to self, not just in heart, but in lifestyle, as well. This meaning of "self-denial" also fits with the discussion of Jesus' discipleship from chapter two. Disowning self is refusing to be allied to the self, or letting self reign over, define, and determine one's life. Instead, someone else is given allegiance and complete devotion – Christ.

**The Meaning of "Take Up His Cross"**

Jesus includes in his call to discipleship in Mk. 8:34 a statement which, 2000 years later, is frightfully familiar to us: "take up his cross." A cross is necessarily imbued with heavy religious connotations today; we put crosses on our Bibles and in our artwork, they are in almost every church, and I myself wore a necklace with a cross on it for my wedding day. But in first century Palestine, a cross would have brought up none of these representations of spirituality or religious devotion. The cross was a method of horrid execution, one well-known throughout the Roman Empire. When Christians do take the time to remember what the cross really was for Jesus – a wretched and painful death – we usually do so on Easter, in order to remind ourselves of what Jesus went through. It is the way in which he atoned for the sins of the world. So why would Jesus call others to also "take up a cross" in order to follow him? In what way would this have been related to his own example? What might Jesus have meant by this statement when he gave it *before* his own crucifixion? Although Mark's readers would have been able to reference Christ's

own death on the cross to make sense of such a statement, how could the early disciples have understood Christ's meaning of taking up their own crosses?[126]

There have been many suggestions of how Jesus' statement is to be understood.[127] Very few have taken the view that it should be taken fully literally, as death on a cross for every follower hardly seems to be what Jesus is requiring. The first century believers certainly did not take it this way; although many were martyred, only with the apostle Peter is there any mention of crucifixion. There are those that take it semi-literally, however, claiming that this is essentially a call to martyrdom, or at least, readiness for martyrdom.[128] Especially prevalent among this group are those who propose that since Jesus could not have known how he would be killed, this must be a reference to the likely martyrdom of anyone considered to be a rebel by the Roman Empire – including both Jesus and his followers.[129] Martin Hengel suggests that the concept of "carrying one's cross" may have even been a "Zealot formula" of first century Palestine, reminding anyone who joined the Zealot groups that they could expect crucifixion from the Romans,

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[126] I am assuming for the purposes of this thesis that Jesus did indeed make this statement to his disciples, and it is not simply an addition by the writer of the gospel of Mark post-Resurrection. I am also assuming that Jesus knew in what way he would be killed, based off of Matthew's description of Jesus' passion predictions in Mt. 20:19 and 26:2.

[127] Michael P. Green has a helpful overview of the various ways in which interpreters have approached this passage in his article "The Meaning of Cross-Bearing," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 140, no. 558 (April-June, 1983): 118-119.

[128] Ibid., 118.

[129] See for example: David P. Seccombe, "Take Up Your Cross," in *The God Who is Rich in Mercy: Essays Presented to Dr. D. B. Knox*, ed. Peter T. O'Brien and David G. Peterson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1986), and John Gwyn Griffiths, "The Disciple's Cross," *New Testament Studies* 16, no. 4 (1970): 358-364. They consider that the statement could only have been added in afterwards by believers who knew how Christ had died, or that Christ is pointing out that he and those who follow him – who will most likely be seen as rebels to the Roman Empire – can expect martyrdom in the usual Roman response to rebellion. There is no consideration in these specific authors of the greater import of Jesus' continuing rule and reign post-Resurrection, and what he might not have simply guessed but *known* of his impending death as ordained by God.

and had to be ready to "carry a cross."[130] Thus, Hengel proposes, Jesus may have adopted the saying to show that "unconditional readiness to die a martyr's death" was expected of his followers.[131] Others see "carry his cross" as a more figurative statement, given by Jesus to make clear to his disciples that suffering will be their lot, just as it is their master's. Eduard Schweizer takes it this way, writing that the cross denotes "participation in Jesus' vocation to suffering and death."[132] Overall, this seems to be the most prevalent view: just as Jesus will suffer and die, so will his disciples be expected to live a life of suffering – or of counting the cost of discipleship – in the same manner. This differs from the semi-literal view in that death is not necessarily emphasized; it is the cost and suffering (which may possibly lead to death) that are the focus of cross-bearing. Still others understand cross-bearing as a very stark picture of what is expected in denying one's self, as using a different lexical meaning of σταυρός,[133] or as a reference to Jewish religious tradition concerning the binding of Isaac.[134]

These approaches have in common that they realize there is some sort of connection between the suffering of Jesus and cross-bearing, but they look only in one

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[130] Martin Hengel, *The Zealots: Investigations into the Jewish Freedom Movement in the Period from Herod I until 70 A.D,* trans. David Smith (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997), 260. In 4 B.C., 2000 Judaean rebels were crucified by the Romans, as were many other groups of Jews who revolted against Rome's rule.

[131] Ibid., 271.

[132] Schweizer, 16.

[133] Green, 118.

[134] Some note the parallel language used in the *Bereshit Rabbah* of the story of the binding of Isaac. Here, Isaac is spoken of as carrying the wood for the burnt offering (on which he is to be the sacrifice) as "as one who bears his cross on his shoulder" in reference to Gen. 22:6b. However, the dating of this document is difficult to pinpoint, and as this particular section is not attributed to any particular teacher, it becomes even less clear when the binding of Isaac was first spoken of in this way. It seems that although "crucifixion associations…found resonance with Jewish understandings" of Gen. 22 after the time of Christ, there can be no certainty that they were there before or during it. From David C. Chapman, *Ancient Jewish and Christian Perceptions of Crucifixion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 203.

place to find the connection. Thus, they only have in view either the political, historical, literary or theological context, and do not consider how all of these together might come to bear on the meaning of cross-bearing in Mk. 8:34.

Those who look at the historical or political context rightly recognize that in order to understand what Jesus means when he calls disciples to "pick up a cross" we must first examine what a cross was, and how and what it was used for in the first century. Those who highlight the literary context rightly recognize that this phrase must be understood within its context of a call to follow the master, a master who throughout Mark asks for complete commitment to himself. Those who look to theological explanations understand that this statement must be held in light of Jesus' own crucifixion, but look for a meaning which could only have been understood post-crucifixion. Thus, they deny any real meaning to the statement pre-crucifixion or need for a historical understanding of cross-bearing and crucifixion. Although its full meaning can only be understood in light of *the* crucifixion, I will contend that the statement had the same meaning – albeit clearer post-crucifixion – both before and after Jesus died on the cross. Thus, our examination of "pick up his cross" will bring all these elements – the historical, literary, and theological contexts – to bear on the meaning of this phrase. As a result, we will find that when placed within these contexts, the call of Jesus to "pick up a cross" in discipleship has a very similar meaning as "following" and "disowning one's self" have: it is a call demanding complete allegiance and submission to Jesus himself.

First, we must understand the historical context of crucifixion and what the mention of a cross would have indicated in the 1st century world. Crucifixion was a common and well-recognized form of cruel execution in the ancient world. It was a

varied practice, and it seems that there were quite a few methods of crucifixion, including different shapes of crosses and means of using them to kill victims.[135] Crucifixion could be performed on someone who was alive, or it could be done to the bodies of those who had already been killed.[136] Generally speaking, it had to do with the "general conceptual field of human bodily suspension,"[137] and a common factor was the binding of the victim to a stake by nails or ties.[138] It was employed so often by the Roman Empire that it might be possible to speak of a normal pattern for crucifixion, but a great deal of variance would have been expected as well, as the "caprice and sadism of the executioners were given full reign" in the practice of crucifixion.[139] In one often-practiced form of crucifixion, the main stake of the cross was put into the ground first, while the condemned carried the cross-beam for the stake – called the *patibulum* in Latin – to the cross to be executed.[140] Although this is not a practice spoken of universally in crucifixion accounts, Plutarch speaks of it in very normative terms, noting that every victim of crucifixion carried his cross on his back.[141] This is how the gospels describe the crucifixion of Jesus, and although the cross-beam is not specified, it seems that carrying the cross would refer most often to simply carrying the cross-beam.[142]

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[135] Ibid., 9, 30.

[136] Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 24.

[137] Chapman, 32.

[138] Hengel, *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross,* 24.

[139] Ibid., 25.

[140] Bayer, 182. Hengel also notes that this is a common form of crucifixion in the Roman empire (Hengel, *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross*, 25).

[141] Green references Plutarch's writings in *Moralia,* 554b (Green, 125).

[142] Griffiths, 360.

But apart from the simple understanding of what crucifixion entailed, a first century audience would also have associated with crucifixion a certain kind of crime. Crucifixion was used for specific purposes. It punished betrayal, rebellion, murder, and other extremely serious crimes.[143] It was used mostly on the lower classes, and especially for slaves who had rebelled against their masters.[144] It was also used to intimidate and suppress potentially rebellious people groups, even being used in sieges to break the spirits of the city's inhabitants and terrify them into submission.[145] The use of crucifixion had a political emphasis, sending a statement to others who might try to rebel against the Roman Empire.[146] Crucifixion was a horribly brutal and painful death, designed to be humiliating and dishonoring to the victim, but also to deter any others from following in the crucified's footsteps.[147] It was a statement that the one crucified had been forced "to submit to the authority or rule one formerly rebelled against."[148] The last actions of the one being crucified, in this form of carrying one's cross, publicly displayed the full submission of the one going to his own death.[149]

As a result, the Greco-Roman world mostly viewed crucifixion as a terrible but "necessary" part of keeping the peace of the Roman Empire.[150] It was viewed as a

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[143] Hengel, *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross*, 34.

[144] Ibid., 34, 51.

[145] Ibid., 46.

[146] Ibid.

[147] Ibid., 87. Green notes the account of Chariton of Aphrodisias, writing in the 1st or 2nd c. A.D., who speaks of crucifixion being used specifically as a deterrent to future rebels (Green, 125).

[148] Ibid., 120.

[149] Ibid., 127.

[150] Hengel, *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross,* 79.

punishment given to those who deserved it, used to "protect the populace against dangerous criminals and violent men."[151] The Jew would have had an additional layer of association with crucifixion, however, as many of his own countrymen had been crucified because of their desire to be liberated from the Roman Empire.[152] As such, the Jew would have had a concept of innocent people being crucified, including those who might have "intense commitment to the ideals of Judaism."[153] Although death on a cross was seen as humiliating, its shame did not for the Jew necessarily taint the innocent sufferer who endured it.[154] However, crucifixion was seen in both cultures as a "horrendous penalty, often being mentioned among the most extreme forms of death."[155] It was well-known to the entire population, and everyone understood it to be an excruciating punishment reserved for those who were dangerous, especially those who rebelled politically. Its function as a deterrent and statement of submission for those who rebelled would also have been well-recognized by all.

What can we conclude from this overview of crucifixion and a "cross" in first century Palestine? First, crucifixion had connotations of horrific suffering, but also of submission. It was used as more than just a form of execution – it was a form of

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[151] Ibid., 50.

[152] Chapman, 213. Chapman writes that the idea of the crucified "brigand" or crucified "rebel" – two related concepts – would have been known throughout the Second Temple time period in Israel.

[153] Ibid., 214. This could be connected to the concept of the crucified rebel, who was only killed because of their convictions.

[154] Ibid., 216-218. It is unclear to what extent a first century Jewish population would have associated Deut. 21:22-23, which speaks of the curse of one who hangs on a tree, with crucifixion. It was not until after the first century, with the growth of the Rabbinic system, that Rabbis began to write about what connections this passage might or might not have with crucifixion, and there were Rabbis who stood on both sides of the argument. Thus, death by crucifixion was not automatically primarily shameful to the Jew.

[155] Ibid., 96.

execution that also made a statement. Second, although crucifixion could vary in format, the condemned's carrying of the cross-beam to the place of crucifixion further publicly proclaimed Rome's triumph and power over the one being crucified. In a first century context, then, the idea of picking up one's cross would have been seen as the picture of utter submission and relinquishing of power. Although horrible suffering and pain would also have been in view, the picture of actually bearing one's cross would primarily have communicated submission.

When we look at the literary context of Mk. 8:34, we find a similar conclusion as to the meaning of cross-bearing. It seems that not only would the first-century hearers have not necessarily understood martyrdom and suffering as the primary association with carrying one's cross, but that this is not the context in which Jesus addresses cross-bearing, either. As noted in earlier sections, the meaning of "following" in this verse and in Mark as a whole, when used in reference to disciples, has to do with both an external and internal following of Jesus. The external following is an outplaying of the internal embrace of allegiance to Christ. Along with the meaning of ἀπαρνέομαι as disowning one's self in terms of allegiance, there is a focus in this verse on the inward orientation of a disciple. Thus, the more "literal" interpretations which emphasize suffering and especially martyrdom as the primary meaning of cross-bearing fail to take into context the meaning of the rest of the call in 8:34.[156]

[156] The parallel passage of Lk. 12:9 must also be noted here. Luke includes the word "daily" in this saying about bearing the cross, indicating that a literal martyrdom cannot be in view. This further supports the idea that an inward following, cross-bearing-as-submission, and allegiance are all in view in Mk. 8:34, as the "daily" nuance implies that the action, which is done habitually, must be thought of in more metaphorical terms.

The greater context of 8:34 also indicates that cross-bearing should be understood in light of obedience and submission to Christ. Many have noted that it is a passion prediction by Christ in 8:31 which introduces this discipleship call (as elsewhere in Mark), but it seems that the discussion between Peter and Christ just following the passion prediction is what more clearly sets the stage for Jesus' call to discipleship. Peter rebukes Jesus for indicating his future death, but Jesus responds by saying, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man" (8:33). Jesus then calls his disciples and the crowd to him, and gives his discipleship call. The occasion for Jesus' statement, then, is not only the prediction of his suffering and death, but of Peter's insistence on the things of man rather than the things of God.[157] It is because of Peter's adherence to his own agenda, rather than God's, that Jesus gives his call to discipleship. Even in Jesus' passion prediction, the will of God for Jesus' death is very clear. Peter Bolt notes that in 8:31, Mark uses the word δεῖ, "which is often labeled the 'divine necessity,'" when he says that Jesus told his disciples that the Son of Man "must" suffer and die.[158] Indeed, this characterization of Jesus' obedience to God's will is throughout Mark, beginning with his baptism in Mk. 1:11, throughout his determined journey towards Jerusalem, and perhaps most poignantly in the Garden of Gethsemane in 14:36 with his words, "Not my will, but yours be done."[159] Thus, it is the issue of surrender to God's will (and relinquishing of one's own will) which introduces 8:34, and which unlike the disciples, Jesus so willingly and faithfully enacts.

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[157] Green, 120.

[158] Peter G. Bolt, *The Cross from a Distance: Atonement in Mark's Gospel* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 49.

[159] Ibid.

Finally, a look at the greater theological context of the NT also supports such an understanding of cross-bearing. As noted above, many have indicated that Jesus' command to pick up one's own cross and follow him seems to denote imitation of his suffering, and perhaps even his death. And yet, what is it that Christians are exhorted to follow in Christ's work on the cross? It is surely not his atoning work on behalf of humanity. Instead, throughout the Scriptures, Christ's faithful obedience to the will of God is consistently highlighted. In every area of his work, including his sacrificial work on the cross, Christ was obedient to God's will.[160] As already noted, this is heard from Christ's own lips in Mk. 14:36. But Paul also takes special note of Christ's obedience, comparing his obedience to Adam's disobedience in Rom. 5:19, and encouraging Christians in Phil. 2:1-11 to follow Christ's humble attitude in becoming obedient to death on a cross.

In looking at the historical, literary, and theological context of Mk. 8:34, then, we see that the command to "pick up his cross" in this verse has to do with utter and full surrender to Christ. The nature of crucifixion, its association with a statement as to the might and control of Rome, and the practice of the public carrying of the *patibulum* to the place of crucifixion all would have been in the mind of a first-century hearer of the call to carry one's cross. It is the picture of full submission. The literary context of 8:34 shows that this is exactly the issue which Jesus had in mind when he gave this call to discipleship – both in the meaning of the words and concepts in the call itself, and in the occasion which initiated his discussion of discipleship in 8:34. Jesus himself, who was completely obedient to God's will alone, is the ultimate example of obedience and

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[160] Green, 122.

submission to God's will throughout the Scriptures. Thus, even after Jesus' resurrection, when crucifixion would have had a further special meaning for believers, the emphasis on obedience and submission to God would still have been pronounced for any who heard Mark's gospel. As mentioned, this is how Paul speaks of the way in which we are to imitate Christ's work on the cross – in terms of his obedience to God. In light of all this, "cross-bearing" in Mk. 8:34 is a very vivid picture of the submission to the will of Christ, including relinquishing power and control, which discipleship with Jesus requires.

**Chapter Conclusion**

Self-denial and cross-bearing both have to do with complete allegiance not to self, but to Jesus. Self-denial is not a practice or an emptying of personhood, but a disconnection of committed relationship to self. It is also a public expression of an inner attitude – that of allegiance not first and foremost to self, but to Jesus. Cross-bearing expresses where allegiance has been placed – solely with Christ. It is the picture of utter and complete submission and allegiance to Christ. Congruent with the portrayal of Jesus' discipleship given in chapter 2, it is clear from the concepts of self-denial and cross-bearing that Jesus' call to discipleship in Mk. 8:34 has primarily to do with a complete and utter surrender to Jesus as master and Lord.

## Chapter 4

## An Examination of the Imperative Tenses in Mark 8:34

Two other issues within 8:34 must be briefly addressed before moving on to 8:35-37. First, there is a text critical issue in 8:34, with two possible readings for the infinitive following "If anyone wishes" at the beginning of the verse. One reading has the aorist infinitive of ἔρχομαι, ἐλθεῖν, while the other reading has the present infinitive of ἀκολουθέω, ἀκολουθεῖν. Although both readings are widely attested, ἀκολουθεῖν is slightly to be preferred because of its presence in P45. However, whichever reading is taken, the meaning of the verse does not change, and so will not be further dealt with here.[161]

Second, there is an interesting use of tenses in the imperatives of 8:34. The pattern is as follows: If anyone wishes (present) to follow (present) after me, he must disown (aorist) himself, pick up (aorist) his cross, and follow (present) me. Two aorist imperatives are followed by a present imperative. The aorist imperative usually views the command "as a whole, without regard for the internal make-up of the action," thus often used for a "*specific* command rather than a general precept."[162] In contrast, the present imperative "looks at the action from an internal viewpoint," and is used mostly for "general precepts – i.e., for habits that should characterize one's attitudes and behavior –

[161] Morna Dorothy Hooker, *Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Mark* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 209. Hooker notes that the meaning of the verse is not dependent on this text critical issue.

[162] Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 719.

rather than in specific situations."[163] The present focuses much more on the repetitive, progressive, customary, or constant nature of an action rather than specifically on its beginning or occasion.[164] With this in mind, commentators have focused on the nature of the commands to "disown himself" and "take up his cross" either as decisive and once-for-all,[165] or as focused on the beginning of these actions.[166] But especially when the parallel passage of Lk. 9:23 is taken into account, which has both the aorist imperatives and an additional adverbial clause καθ' ἡμέραν ("daily"), then the interpretation that it is only the initial decision to do these things no longer seems plausible. In addition, the bracketing of these two aorist imperatives by two present-tense uses of ἀκολουθέω frames these commands within a durative context of following. Thus, these are not commands which are to be fulfilled once and never again, but that have an ingressive sense. These acts begin a certain way of life which is then characterized by the same acts which began it – disowning allegiance to self and surrendering to Jesus. The nature of "cross-bearing" itself suggests this – Jesus commands that his followers "pick up" the cross, implying that they will then be carrying it as a result. Their lives will continue to be characterized by submission to him.

The present tense imperative of ἀκολουθέω should be seen in light of what it means to "follow Jesus," as from the previous discussion about the nature of Jesus'

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[163] Ibid., 721.

[164] Nigel Turner, *Syntax,* vol. 3 of *A Grammar of New Testament Greek* by James Hope Moulton (1963, repr., Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1980), 74-75.

[165] C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (1959, repr., Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), 282. Also Turner, 76.

[166] Joel Marcus, *Mark 8-16: a New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 617.

discipleship. Its present tense highlights the "continuous relationship" which Jesus has in mind when he calls people to follow him.[167]

In conclusion, the switch in tense between the first two imperatives and the third is not to contrast them or to put these imperatives into two distinct categories, but to point out that there are certain actions which must be taken before one can follow Jesus. These are not conditions, but pointers to the nature of discipleship – Jesus cannot be followed in discipleship if the disciple does not disown allegiance to himself and surrender to Christ. This surrender does not happen only once and for all, however, but continues to characterize discipleship under Jesus. Just as the discipleship began, so does it continue.

[167] Cranfield, 282.

## Chapter 5

## Mk. 8:35-37 as a Commentary on Mk. 8:34

8:35-37, which makes up the rest of Jesus' call to discipleship, forms a sort of commentary on Jesus' statement in 8:34. This is seen in the way these verses are introduced, each of them beginning with the postpositive γάρ, indicating that 8:35-37 are a "series of reasons justifying Jesus' startling assertion in 8:34."[168] Because of this, they will be treated in this thesis as a short commentary which sheds light on 8:34, and not focused on in-depth.

8:35-37 reads,

> "For if anyone wishes to save his soul, he will lose it. But if anyone will lose his soul for the sake of me and the gospel, he will save it. For what does it help a person to gain the whole world but to be forfeited his soul? For what can a person give in exchange for his soul?" (my translation).

A key issue lies in how ψυχή is to be understood in these verses. As a word whose meaning is notoriously difficult to parse (under the BDAG reference for ψυχή, the introduction reads, "it is often impossible to draw hard and fast lines in the use of this multivalent word"),[169] commentators have understood it in 8:35-37 in basically two different ways. Some claim that Jesus is making a wordplay off two possible meanings of ψυχή. In this line of thinking, Jesus is referencing 8:34 as a call to martyrdom – those who wish to save their lives (and avoid martyrdom) will, in the end, forfeit their souls.

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[168] Evans, 24.

[169] BDAG, s.v. "ψυχή"

But those who give of their lives willingly will actually save their souls.[170] Others, however, have in view a consistent use throughout this passage of the word ψυχή, each time with the sense of the whole person or the entirety of a person.[171] If it is indeed a wordplay on ψυχή which Jesus is employing in these verses, then the meaning of 8:34 changes to hold martyrdom primarily in view. However, if ψυχή has a consistent meaning in these verses having to do with the entirety of a person, then 8:35-37 simply further explains and upholds the interpretation of 8:34 which we have already discussed: that of complete allegiance and submission to the authoritative Lord Jesus Christ. By means of a brief word study on ψυχή and a closer examination of the language and structures used within 8:35-37, I will contend that ψυχή is used consistently throughout these verses with reference to the entirety of a person. As it is not the purpose of this thesis to give a full treatment of the term ψυχή with all its nuances in the NT, I will here find it sufficient to show that such an understanding of ψυχή in 8:35-37 fits well within the range of meaning of the word, as well as fitting better than the alternative within 8:35-37 in light of the vocabulary and structure of these verses. Additionally, having addressed the meaning of ψυχή in 8:35-37, I will briefly comment on the difference in 8:35 from its parallel passages, as well as implications of the allusion in 8:37 to Ps. 49:7-9.

To understand the range of meaning of ψυχή, we will look first at its use in the Septuagint. In the Septuagint, ψυχή is used over 900 times, most often as a translation

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[170] A few commentators who take this view: Cranfield, 282; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, Doubleday Bible Commentary( New York: Doubleday, 1998), 110; Hooker, 209; William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark: the English Text with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 308.

[171] Commentators who take this view: Ben Witherington, *The Gospel of Mark: a Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 245; Brooks, 138; BDAG, s.v. "ψυχή."

for נֶפֶשׁ, but also to translate לֵב (25 times), חַיָה (5 times) רוּחַ (twice) and אִישׁ (once).[172] It has two general meanings. It can simply refer to a living person, as in Ex. 21:23, in which it refers to a life being the price paid for a life taken.[173] But it is also used to mean the "uniting factor for the inner power of man," or of the "whole self" of a person.[174] It is the place of understanding, knowledge, and emotions, and encompasses the entirety of a human being.[175] For instance, it is used of Jonathan and David's friendship in 1 Sam. 18:1, in which the text reads that Jonathan loved David as his own ψυχή. The predominant usage in the OT lies here, with ψυχή referencing "simultaneously *vital power* and *life*, the *person* himself or herself, capable of feeling and emotion."[176] Josephus uses it with this OT meaning, but also as of being alive or with a more Hellenistic dualism of contrasting the soul (ψυχή) and the body.[177] In the NT, it is used 101 times, with 52 of those within the Synoptic gospels and Acts,[178] and it retains a similar usage to the OT. It can refer simply to being alive (as in Mt. 6:25, when Jesus teaches that a person need not be anxious for his ψυχή, or for his bodily need of eating to stay alive), or it can be used of the whole person (as in Mt. 11:29, when Jesus speaks of rest for the ψυχή).[179] The Markan usage of the word reflects this. Besides its use in 8:35-

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[172] Günther Harder, "ψυχή," in *NIDNTT*, 3:679-680.

[173] Ibid., 680.

[174] Ibid.

[175] Ibid.

[176] Alexander Sand, "ψυχή," in *EDNT*, 3:501.

[177] Harder, 681.

[178] Ibid., 682.

[179] Ibid., 683. As in the OT conception of ψυχή, the focus on the inner person is not in contrast to the body (as Greek dualism would propose), but as encompassing the entirety of the person. Because of this, even if we were to accept the premise that Jesus is using a wordplay on the two different meanings of ψυχή in

37, it is used in 3:4 in opposition to killing, in 10:45 of Jesus' giving his life as a ransom, in 12:30 in Jesus' quoting the Shema, and in 14:34 of Jesus' great sorrow in the Garden of Gethsemane. Thus, its uses within Mark outside of 8:35-37 are split between referencing being alive (3:4, 10:45) and the whole person (12:30, 14:34). There is nothing in the range of the meaning for ψυχή or its usage within Mark and the NT which requires us to understand Jesus to be using a wordplay in 8:35-37.

Next, we turn to the vocabulary of 8:35-37. The word Jesus uses to describe "losing" one's ψυχή is ἀπόλλυμι, which can mean "to cause or experience destruction, to fail to obtain what one expects or anticipates, or to lose something that one already has or be separated from a normal connection."[180] It is this last meaning which BDAG cites as the meaning for ἀπόλλυμι in 8:35, that of losing connection or being separated from a normal connection. This language is highly reminiscent of the meaning of ἀπαρνέομαι as "disowning" or "disassociation" which we examined in 8:34.

But while these two points show that the meaning of ψυχή as the whole self fits within 8:35-37, an examination of the paradox within 8:35 shows that this understanding fits best. Mitzi Minor defines the use of Jesus' paradox here as "a brief, pointed saying that makes a strong, unqualified statement by means of a sharp contrast. The contrast is expressed in a wordplay that uses the same words in positive and negative form or which uses antithetical words."[181] The rhetorical purpose of such a saying is to challenge the underlying assumptions of the audience, and by use of an oxymoron, require them to

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8:35-37, it would not be to contrast the body and the spirit, but to contrast losing bodily life with losing the entirety of one's person.

[180] BDAG, s.v. "ἀπόλλυμι"

[181] Mitzi Minor, *The Spirituality of Mark: Responding to God* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 59.

think differently about concepts they may have taken for granted (for example, that losing one's life is indeed losing, and not saving). In order to better understand what such a paradox is actually claiming, Narry F. Santos uses the method of "transfiguration" in order to transform a paradox – by use of its surrounding context – from a paradoxical format to a metaphor format.[182] In light of its greater context, Santos untwists the pretzel of the metaphor, recognizing that the wish to "save one's self" is aligned with "gaining the whole world," and that "losing one's self" for Jesus is aligned with not being ashamed of Jesus (from v. 38) and with the commands of 8:34 (disowning one's self, carrying one's cross, and following Jesus).[183] Thus, the paradox used in 8:35 reflects its surrounding context of pursuing the interests of man (the effort to gain the whole world) instead of the interests of God (moving away from or disconnecting from/losing anything which would hinder allegiance to Jesus).[184] If this is the meaning of the paradox, then saving and losing must have to do with the whole self – including the self's interests and entire personhood – rather than simply the physical life.

Finally, although v. 38 will not be considered in-depth in this thesis, it may be noted that the language of "being ashamed" of Jesus fits better within an understanding of 8:34-37 having more to do with allegiance to Jesus than martyrdom for him. Indeed, if we remember the meaning of ἀπαρνέομαι within the NT as having to do with allegiance, and in particular, its use of Peter's disowning Christ (or being ashamed of his

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[182] Narry F. Santos, "Jesus' Paradoxical Teaching in Mark 8:35; 9:35; and 10:43-44," *Bibliotheca sacra* 157, no. 625 (Ja-Mr 2000): 15.

[183] Ibid., 19, 20.

[184] Ibid., 19.

association with him), then it seems likely that this emphasis on allegiance carries throughout the entire passage of 8:34-38.

In conclusion as to the meaning of ψυχή in 8:35-37, then, it would seem highly likely that it is being used in the sense of the "whole person" rather than as a wordplay between the two meanings of physical life and the soul. Thus, it does not sway the meaning of this call to discipleship towards having martyrdom primarily in mind for the follower of Jesus. However, as with 8:34, this does not mean that allegiance *to the point of death* may not also be in view here. It is that the focus of Jesus here is not primarily on martyrdom.

We next move on to the main difference between Mk. 8:34-37 and its parallel passages in Mt. 16:24-26 and Lk. 9:23-25. In 8:35, Mark includes the words, "for the sake of me and the gospel."[185] This phrase highlights the centrality of Jesus in discipleship. Whether or not any who would follow Jesus end up losing or saving their entire persons depends completely upon their allegiance to Jesus.[186] There is an "absolute" nature to this call, and it is completely focused on Christ himself.[187]

Lastly, Jesus' words in 8:37 seem to allude to Ps. 49:7-9. Ps. 49 is a wisdom psalm, in which the Sons of Korah essentially conclude that "true wisdom is to know that humanity's one hope is in God, who alone can redeem from the pit."[188] The Psalm opens

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[185] I will not address the source or reason for this inclusion in 8:35.

[186] Lane, 308.

[187] Cranfield, Hooker, and Lane all note the "absoluteness" of this statement, writing that it is "the absoluteness of his claim to their allegiance to his person" (Cranfield, 282), that it shows Jesus' claim to "absolute authority" (Hooker, 209), and that it shows the "absoluteness of Jesus' claim upon the allegiance of main to his own person" (Lane, 308).

[188] Rikki E. Watts, "Mark," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 183.

with a statement in 49:1-4 which calls for all the world including the rich and the poor, the "low and the high," to listen to the Psalmists' words.[189] The main topic is then introduced – "Why should I fear in times of trouble?" (49:5a) – and names those who would make him fear as those who trust in riches (49:6a). It is with this context that 49:7-9 arise: "Truly no man can ransom another, or give to God the price of his life, for the ransom of their life is costly and can never suffice, that he should live on forever and never see the pit." The rest of the Psalm claims that no amount of power on earth – naming lands after yourself, being wise, many riches, or achieving much glory – will change the fact that no man can save himself from death. It is all "foolish confidence" (49:13a), and there is no need to be afraid of such people (49:5, 16). In both the middle of the Psalm and at its end, there is a repeated statement – man's "pomp" does not save him, and even with it, he is still "like the beasts that perish" (49:12, 20).

The overlap of 8:36-37 with these verses is obvious. Both speak in mainly monetary terms, with "exchange" in Mk. 8:37, and "the price of his life" and "ransom" in Ps. 49:7-9.[190] Both have to do with an effort of man to save himself by a means which can never match the value of what he is trying to save. Perhaps what is most relevant for our discussion on discipleship is what light the reference to Ps. 49 casts on the meaning of ψυχή in 8:35-37. If Jesus is referencing a Psalm which is mostly concerned with whether or not man is able to avoid death, then does this point towards a context for ψυχή which necessitates that in Mk. 8:35-37, as in Ps. 49, it is physical life, and not the whole self, which is in view?

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[189] Ibid., 183.

[190] Ibid.

A major similarity and a major dissimilarity between Mk. 8:35-37 and Ps. 49:7-9 are here helpful to note. The major similarity lies within their themes. Both are focused on a bigger picture of allegiance, trust, and purpose. Ps. 49 does deal with the efforts of man to secure himself from physical death, but specifically by putting his trust, hope, and allegiance with wealth as opposed to with God. Similarly, Mk. 8:35-37 lies within the context of a passage about where one's allegiance lies – is it with Jesus and the things of God, or with the things of man? In addition, there is a major dissimilarity. Although both passages use financial language, Ps. 49 much more clearly has the issue of wealth and riches in mind, whereas Mk. 8:35-37 is not addressing the value of riches at all. This pushes us to recognize that not everything in Ps. 49 matches perfectly with Mk. 8:35-37. The connection is thematic, not in the specifics: both have to do with man's efforts to safeguard himself, a thing which is impossible apart from allegiance to God. Whether or not physical life or the whole self is in view is not the point of Jesus' allusion to Ps. 49:7-9. However, as was noted above with the meaning of ψυχή, losing one's whole person is not completely in opposition to losing one's physical life. One's "whole person" includes physical life. But what this allusion to Ps. 49:7-9 really highlights is that there are only two paths – Jesus' way, and everything else.[191] A choice must be made between these two.

In conclusion, 8:35-37 serve as a commentary to Jesus' call to discipleship in 8:34. Within them, he further explains what it means to follow him with the whole heart by means of a paradox. Within this stark paradox, he explains that a person's ψυχή, or whole self, must be given to Christ in discipleship. An effort to save one's self by

[191] Ibid., 184.

disowning Christ (being “ashamed” of him) and following the things of man rather than the things of God only lead to losing one’s self. The use of the words “for my sake and for the gospel” highlight the centrality of Jesus in discipleship, and of utter allegiance to him. The allusion to Ps. 49:7-9 is a thematic one, in which the foolishness of seeking to save one’s self apart from trust in God is highlighted. In these ways, 8:35-37 further explain the nature of discipleship as complete allegiance and submission to Christ Jesus.

## Chapter 6

## Conclusion and Application

Every part of Jesus' call to discipleship in Mk. 8:34 is a call to be fully allied and submitted to him. The form of discipleship echoes the OT covenantal call – one of complete allegiance and devotion to God. To "follow" Jesus means to inwardly and outwardly respond to his call. To deny one's self means to disconnect from allegiance to self, or to outwardly express the inward disposition of the heart of disowned commitment to self. To bear a cross means to be utterly submitted to Christ. The tenses of the commands indicate that these things *must* be done in order to be a disciple of Christ, and must continue to characterize life with him. "For the gospel and my sake" puts Christ, once more, at the center of allegiance and as the reason for disowning self. 8:35-37 explains that allegiance to self will cause utter ruin, and that only allegiance to Christ gives any assurance or safety. Each phrase and concept within Mk. 8:34-37 resounds with the heartbeat of, "Allegiance, surrender."

This, then, is discipleship as portrayed in Mk. 8:34: a call to allegiance and surrender to Jesus himself. So how should we practice and talk about discipleship from this passage? Much could be said on this, but three main areas will be addressed here: the concept of the "cost" of discipleship, the place of "self" in discipleship, and the depth or extremity of discipleship.

What is the "cost" of discipleship? Christians are often encouraged to "count the cost" of following Christ, with Mk. 8:34 (as well as other discipleship passages) in mind. The idea of counting the cost of discipleship can imply that discipleship consists of doing things that "cost" us, or of being ready to "pay" anything into our discipleship accounts, so to speak.[192] It is thus very easy for the believer to look for and identify "costly" things in his or her life, and endeavor to give them up. One especially twisted conception of this is the way that many Christians practice Lent. It has become a popular trend within Evangelical circles to give something up for Lent – often something as trivial as sugar, chocolate, or soda. Those who take it more seriously might give up something which takes up more time – such as Facebook or another internet site – but rarely do these believers do this in a way which actually enables closer following of the Lord.[193] The exact amount of time spent in a foregone activity does not immediately get spent in time with the Lord, in study of his Word, or in service to him. In addition, such Lenten practice can indicate that poor dietary or time choices are allowable in the regular Christian life, but not during a special few weeks of the calendar year. We speak often of the "costliness" of discipleship, but rarely of what this actually means. Thus, it is interpreted as "anything which feels costly to me" – even down to giving up candy for a six-week period of time.

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[192] In this section, as in the following section about the place of "self" in discipleship, I am not claiming that everyone who talks of the "cost of discipleship" necessarily has these misinterpretations in mind. However, it is important to note how these concepts have been abused and are often sub-consciously wrongly applied to discipleship.

[193] I do not wish to necessarily demean every Lenten form of fasting, and will not address the theology or mindset behind Lent as a whole. Here, I merely point out the misplaced practice of Lent fasting by many Christians.

A thorough understanding of Mk. 8:34, however, does not focus on counting the cost of discipleship, but on discipleship *regardless* of the cost. While this may initially seem to be the same thing, the emphasis is completely different. The idea in Mk. 8:34-38 is that the disciple of Christ is allegiant to or unashamed of him, regardless of the consequences. Instead of focusing on the costliness of this decision, the focus is on faithfulness to Christ himself. Thus, it is not that believers are supposed to be "ready for martyrdom," but that they should be allegiant to Christ regardless of whether or not this will require from them their physical lives. Allegiance to Christ, then, requires openness of hand in every area of life. Everything is submitted to Christ, and the believer seeks to follow Christ faithfully regardless of the consequences or of what following may involve.

Ironically, this is more difficult than "counting the cost." With surrendering to Christ as the focus, the greatness or littleness of the cost is no longer emphasized. Instead, the orientation and attitude of the heart must be closely kept watch over by the believer, constantly kept tabs on, so to speak.[194] It is a continuous turning of the heart towards Christ, instead of a constant cutting-off of costly areas.

This leads to the second application point. Discipleship as presented in Mk. 8:34 requires emotional health, or Christ-submitted knowledge of self. Discipleship-as-surrender-and-allegiance pushes back on wrong conceptions of "self-denial" and "cross-bearing." As mentioned in the introduction, self-denial can be seen as, "If it's painful, it's probably good for me. If it's difficult, it's part of discipleship. To deny the 'self' in me means to deny what it wants, needs, and desires." This gets translated into all sorts of damaging practices. If a relationship is painful, hard, and demanding, then I shouldn't

[194] Bayer has an excellent discussion of what this means in *A Theology of Mark*, pp. 109-112, and also pp. 188-190.

draw boundaries around my heart and time, but give whatever is needed of me by any difficult person. If I'm in a difficult situation with my family, friends, or at work, then that's a good thing. If I am overworked in my job, or at church, or asked too much of, then I should embrace that, forgetting myself. If I feel underappreciated at work and desire commendation on my abilities, or am single and desire to be married, or am infertile and desire children, or have difficulty socially and desire to make friends (and so on), that desire is simply of "self." Sometimes, even if a believer acknowledges that it is not bad to desire being married, having children, commendation at work and so on, the desire still becomes "suspect" and is demeaned by the believer. It is dismissed, with the rationale that focus should be on Christ, and desires must always be pushed aside. The disciple should just "try harder" not to have these desires.

Of course, there are many times in the Christian life in which we sacrifice for others, and in which Christ calls us to love difficult people, be involved in difficult situations, and endure difficult things. But just as the Christian life does not try to avoid pain and suffering, neither is its purpose to seek it out. As we have seen, denying self and bearing the cross have to do with surrender and allegiance to Christ. Because of this, the "self" must be well-known, well-known enough to know when its desires are spot-on with Christ's, and when they are contrary to his will. The desire to pull back from church activities to spend time with one's family may be fear in one person, and a righteous longing in another. The pain of a difficult relationship and the longing to be out of it may be selfishness in one person, and a right recognition of the relationship's unhealthiness and damaging effects for another. It is not that all parts of self are bad, and thus to be ignored, repressed, pushed to the side, or thrown out, but that all parts of self are to be

submitted to Christ. Thus, we must know ourselves very well indeed. We know ourselves well not just to identify and root out the sin in our lives, but to carefully align each heart's desire closer to Christ.

Third, in identifying what Jesus' call to discipleship-as-allegiance has to do with modern-day attitudes towards discipleship in the church, an inconsistency must be noted. Despite the many interpretations of this passage as representing discipleship as painful and repressive of self, a strange dichotomy exists in many believers' lives today. We are simultaneously very generous with ourselves, and very demanding. Thus, we claim that discipleship is supposed to be this self-repressing act, in which we find costly things and get rid of them, and we sometimes act in this way. But we also rationalize our various sinful habits and patterns, retaining control over our lives. The Evangelical church in America can be simultaneously very lax and very stringent when it comes to the issue of what life under Christ should look like. It must be noted that in Mk. 8:34, the picture of surrender is not only extremely definite and challenging, it is also very clear as to its depths and lengths. Followers of Christ are to be so submitted to him that they align themselves more closely with him than with their own selves. They are actually like a defeated criminal, walking under his instrument of submission to his place of execution. This is the level of discipleship for every believer – complete and utter surrender.

We have seen that the purpose of this is not to indicate primarily that following Christ is equal to great suffering. It is instead to indicate the depth of submission and allegiance to Christ. However, it cannot be missed that discipleship under Christ is not a game. There are no half-measures. No one can "sort of" bear the cross of surrender. Discipleship is not a hobby, a side-compartment to life, or anything less than total and

complete internal and external allegiance and submission in every area of life and in every corner of the heart.

To be a disciple of Christ is to hold nothing back. It is complete surrender, regardless of the cost. But instead of asking for eradication of self, it requires the follower to know himself or herself well, *so that* Christ can be known more fully and followed more closely. And Christ himself, although he asks for everything, is a master who gives so much more in return. He is the master of every part of life, but he is a tender and gentle master. This is who the disciple surrenders himself to, without fear of losing self, or of being oppressed or repressed. Discipleship as expressed in the call of Jesus in Mk. 8:34 is a heart and life in total submission and allegiance to Jesus Christ.

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