

It is wonderful to hear from you, Pastor _____!

I enlarged my font to its largest size in my email to help you see it :). It had not occurred to me before today that you might have difficulty reading it - I'm sorry about that!

I thank the Lord for the wonderful ways He has ministered through you to your community. It is a blessing to hear of this Catholic family coming to you and of your testimony to them regarding the Gospel. We will be in prayer for them. It is also wonderful to hear of your labors in your children's ministry. We will keep you in prayer regarding these matters.

As to your question regarding Luke 9:60, here are some thoughts:

This is a difficult passage to understand in these modern times, but if you look at the cultural practices of this time in history, it makes much more sense. The man here is clearly the eldest son, as the eldest child would be responsible for the funeral of his father. To "bury" your father meant much more than attend to the funeral. This means that he was the primary inheritor of his father's estate. Today, children go to school and pursue their own careers and when their parents die, they might inherit money, cars, or other assets.

But in the ancient world, children were being raised to fill their father's shoes and inherit their father's livelihood – his farm, his fishing operation, his carpentry shop, etc. This meant they were expected to take their father's place in the business, keep it going, and expand it beyond what he did, so their children could inherit an even better livelihood from them and keep it going. Your inheritance became your life.

It isn't like today where your father might have been a railroad worker but you can go to school and become anything – maybe a surgeon. And when he dies, he might leave you money or his house, but that doesn't change what you are doing.

So, the young man was in essence saying, "I can't follow you now because the cultural and family expectation is that I take over my father's estate and business – this is what I have to live for right now. Perhaps in many years I will be able to follow you, but not anytime soon."

Jesus' response was to say that those who live for worldly things are dead (spiritually). "Let those who live for those dead things (and are spiritually dead) take care of those dead things. You, however, follow me." Jesus was NOT telling the man that he couldn't take care of burying his father, attend the funeral, or be responsible to his family.

In this particular man's situation, Jesus was most likely saying, "pass your inherited business to another (most likely a younger brother, who was expected to work under the older brother), for I have called you to follow me and preach the Gospel."

Without knowing the culture of the time, it is a difficult passage to understand, but it is also valuable to us today. Many people put their careers and earthly responsibilities above all things and do not care for God. If you do this you are spiritually dead, living for dead things that will

perish. As Christians, we can also be tempted to put things in our lives above God in our hearts. We are not to do this. What is the greatest commandment?

“And He said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the great and foremost commandment. 39 The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matthew 22:37-39).

Some who call themselves Christians put the second commandment above the first (they love men more than God and His Word). This is idolatry. We must Love God above all things with our whole being, and from this foundation, comes our love for our neighbors. Whenever we sin, we are putting whatever we are sinning for above God. This is why we must confess our sins to Him, and He will forgive us.

We are to be responsible for what God has given us (spouse, children, parents, etc), but only as God has made us responsible for them (we are not to live for the whims or desires of our parents, spouses, children at the expense of God's leading). We should not put anything above God in our hearts, but we also know that He would never ask us to abandon our spouses, family, or children to work for Him. Paul makes this clear to Timothy:

“But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Timothy 5:8).

Unfortunately, many men throughout history have abandoned their families to “work for the Lord.” This was very common in Roman Catholic times, when many men and women abandoned their spouses and children to “dedicate” themselves to God by becoming Monks or Nuns. This practice has no basis in Scripture - after all, one of the qualifications to be an Elder is that you are married and responsible to your spouse:

“For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, 6 namely, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion” (Titus 1:5-6).

Abandoning your responsibilities to family for some "higher calling" has more in common with Buddhism, where Buddha abandoned his family to become a monk.

I think Jesus, as the founder of our Faith, is an excellent contrast to Buddha, the founder of Buddhism. Jesus was never married and had no children. His only earthly responsibility was to his parents (and Joseph appears to have died before Jesus began His ministry). While Jesus did not take over Joseph's carpentry business (as was the cultural expectation), He never abandoned His responsibility to His mother. As he was dying on the cross, He took the time to pass His responsibility to her and care for her onto His disciple John (not to one of his earthly half-brothers):

“When Jesus then saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, ‘Woman, behold, your son!’ 27 Then He said to the disciple, ‘Behold, your mother!’ From that hour the disciple took her into his own household” (John 19:26-27).

To abandon your responsibilities, as defined by God, is not what God desires, for He gave you these things to guard, protect, and cherish and our heavenly rewards will be judged also by how faithful we were to these responsibilities. But we do these things in honor of Him, not because these things are more important to us than God. We must be careful that we are not living for the desires of those who are spiritually “dead”, nor putting dead things above God in our hearts. Instead, we live for Jesus, who is alive! Let the "dead" take care of dead things, for you must live for the life of Christ!

Let me know if that makes sense.

Love in our Lord, Brother!

Berean Lamp Ministries