

NO RISK

By

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This is the eye-catching headline on many an ad that comes to the mail box.
“No risk involved. Act now!”

We have become so security conscious that we have created an antiseptic world where no one ever takes a risk, not even with God. The cry for security has drowned out all other considerations, even the call of Christ.

When it comes to taking risks, God might be seen as the greatest risk-taker of all. Only twelve men were chosen to establish the greatest institution of all time, and one of them was a known traitor. None of them bore credentials for such a work and were sadly inexperienced.

The challenge of Christ was to those who were willing to risk all. “Deny yourself,” He said. “The foxes have holes and the birds of the heaven have nests, but the Son of man has no place to lay his head.” This is risky, to give out such information, when you are pleading with men to “Come, take my yoke upon you.”

He went much farther than that. To follow Him is to be hated, persecuted and even to lose life! The church had hardly begun when Steven was stoned to death for daring to preach the truth. The disciples were scattered by persecution, but went everywhere preaching, running the same risk of losing their lives. They were untrained, unorganized, under-financed and totally without public support. The Word they preached was contrary to all popular opinion and hostile to all religion. By all human standards it was bound to fail.

“By all human standards” is just the way many want to conduct the business of God today. Why take any risk? Before launching the church, make sure you have all the ingredients that will attract, persuade, capture and hold the people. This includes material facilities, entertainment, proper psychological approaches and men skilled in sophisticated manipulation. All this is to be worked out statistically, (by human standards) so that the right numbers may be involved in order to get the proper result.

It makes us pity poor Paul, who had none of these advantages and risked his precious time and energies often with tragic results: beatings, imprisonments and mere handfuls of converts for all the effort expended. Had he calculated his missionary work by the standards of the modern “Church Growth” movement, he would never have left Damascus over the wall in a basket! (What kind of public relations would you call that?)

“I never argue politics nor religion,” is a statement we have heard for years. And why not? These are probably the two most important subjects anyone can discuss. But it’s risky to uphold truth and righteousness in the face of all the lies that are promoted by great and powerful organizations. Too often the believer avoids any confrontation on these subjects, and leaves the field to the evil and the ignorant, with the result that false ideas prevail.

Should we run the risk of speaking? Jesus did. “But now you seek to kill me, a man that has told you the truth” (John 8:40). Paul did. “I am pure from the blood of all

men. For I shrank not from declaring unto you the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:26–27). When the burning issue was illicit sex, Paul gave clear instructions (I Cor. 5). When the Galatian Christians were being influenced by Jews to resort to Judasistic ritual in lieu of faith in Christ’s atonement, Paul wrote: “If any man preaches unto you any gospel other than that which you received, let him be cursed” (Gal. 1:9). He tells us that we are to live as blameless children of God “in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you are seen as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life” (Phil. 2:15–16).

Evangelists often appeal for conversion on the basis that all the risk is removed from Christianity. Being Christian is fun. Surrender to Jesus and He will remove all the heartaches and smooth all the rough spots; join the Christian gang and let the fun-times begin! It’s all hallelujah stuff from then on! Not according to Christ. Jesus called men to follow Him not for fun, but for the serious business of spiritual warfare. He promised self-denial, persecution, severance from loved ones and a life of hard work. Today the church calls people to enter a life of retirement from conflict, to find a world of social pleasure within a circle of people whose seeking and searching is over and who have ceased taking risks.

The church advertises itself as “glowing” and “friendly,” but one can find friendliness at the corner tavern. What Christ offered was a “sect everywhere spoken against,” because it was confronting men with God’s demand and His promise: repentance and resurrection. The apostles urged no one to come into the church, rather the church went out to the world to overcome it with the gospel. Becoming a Christian is to forsake all, to leave the way of pleasure-filled life to do battle for Christ.

The advocates of a no-risk faith, who pattern the church after the world’s love for security and popularity, are the ones who are running the greatest risk of all, “For what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his life?” And this loss of which Jesus speaks is eternal loss, the total and eternal loss of life itself. This is the stake in the game — LIFE. It cannot be gained nor secured by anything short of God’s own power. Man cannot secure it for himself. It is a gift of grace, to those who trust, not themselves, but God. The surest way to fail to attain it is to fail to trust God.

Therefore what is there to risk? “Whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.” This does not mean for one to think so lightly of life that he misuses it, abuses it and risks it out of carelessness or indifference. It means that one thinks so much of the immortal life Christ gives that he will risk everything for it — money, prestige, friends, family, and even his mortal life.

It means that one weighs a matter against the will of God, not against the fashion of the mob. It means that one counts the costs in terms of Gospel influence, not personal affluence. It means that one counts opportunities to save men, not to save money. It means that one counts as nothing all this world offers, because it is only temporary, but treasures up all the promises of God in the world to come because they are eternal.

When one becomes a Christian he forfeits all claim to security, fame, riches and success in the world to gain that which is eternal, which will be total security, infinite glory, unlimited riches, and success in being in God’s image.

Therefore his “risks” have only to do with that which is of no lasting value and are not nearly so great as they appear to the world. In a sense, then, the Christian doesn’t risk

anything at all, for he already has committed all to God and trusts God's promise that in the end he will inherit the world, as an heir of God and joint-heir with Christ.

It is the timid, the doubter, the fearful, the unbeliever who runs the risk, for in playing it safe for this world he is running the risk of losing the next! "*For the fearful and the unbelieving...their part shall be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone; which is the second death*" (Rev. 21:8).

The church has come so far from the life of reckless abandon to Christ that was seen in its early years that few people really expect very little from it today. It has allied itself with the socialist doctrine of "security now." One of the chief criticisms from inside the church is that there is not enough expression of love. And why not? Because love is risky. As C. S. Lewis wrote, "To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal." Christians may find it hard to offer love, for fear it will be spurned and they will be heartbroken, or worse yet, embarrassed in society. But of a true believer we expect better things. We expect a Christian to be so anchored in the hope of the gospel that he is more afraid of displeasing God than of displeasing society.

Jesus said, "He that wills to do his will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from myself" (John 7:17). A great many who claim to want the Christian faith never quite reach the point of real trust, because they will not run the risk of actually doing the Lord's will. They are afraid to love too much, to give too much, to oppose the world too much. They are afraid NOT to lay up in store for themselves, afraid NOT to follow men's traditions, afraid NOT to be friend of the world. They never **will to do God's will**. They will not risk it. Hence they never know the doctrine and never experience for themselves the wonderful joy of trust.

The easy cheap-grace conversion — "just invite Jesus to come in" — is an attempt to offer salvation with no risk involved. It did not originate with Jesus or the apostles. Christ is the One who does the inviting, not man. Christ challenges, commands and promises. Man accepts, obeys and trusts. He risks all the gain of the world, that he may gain Christ. He knows that Christ took the risk when he came into the world, and it cost Him his life. But He did for the joy set before him, and has already received the reward of glory, leaving an example of the ultimate resurrection to immortality and glory that awaits all who risk their earthly lives in order to be His followers.

By following Jesus we can lose only that which in the judgment will be lost anyway. Risk it now, and lay hold on that which is life eternal. "For your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, our life, shall be manifested, then shall you also with him be manifested in glory" (Col. 3:4).

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