

When was the last time you updated the operating system on your PC, or tablet, or phone? Did you read all of the terms and conditions before you checked that little box that means that you have both read and accept them? Or perhaps you have applied for a new credit card or received a letter stating that the terms and conditions of an existing card have been updated. Again, did you even read them before you accepted them? By the way, courts have repeatedly found these wordy and almost undecipherable statements to be legally binding.

To put you firmly in company with your peers: you are not alone! The average set of terms and conditions consist of 2500 words and the average computer user (at least in the younger generations) might use over 1000 different applications, web sites and other material that contain various terms and conditions over the course of a year. If you read at about 200 words per minute that would mean that you have spent nearly eight and one half days reading and agreeing. Oh, that's 8 1/2 24 hour days! Not likely!

But what about the terms and conditions that you have accepted when you state that you have decided to follow Jesus?

The good news is that there are probably less than 2500 essential words. The bad news is that the impact on your life is far greater than agreeing to a modern statement such as that you will not provide a copy of the computer software to any third party.

Today's lesson from 2nd Thessalonians might seem to set a rather strange term and condition upon those who follow Jesus: work or do not eat.

One could use, more likely misuse, this statement. For example when you encounter someone begging on a street corner with a handwritten sign seeking help 'for the love of God.' You might want to throw this verse back at them. Seemingly with God on your side you tell them that God desires that they either work or do not eat. Therefore, get up and get a job!

But this passage is not addressed to the panhandlers amongst the Thessalonians. It is not addressed to those comfortable with what they have but don't want to share it. It was actually addressed to some of the most devout followers of Jesus. They had decided to follow Jesus. They had heard that the Kingdom of God was nigh. They had left their jobs and possessions behind just as the first disciples had. They absolutely believed the Good News: salvation was theirs and they were ready for heaven.

Long-term planning was unnecessary because they fully expected Jesus to return at any moment.

Anything that they did was merely ad-hoc and temporary. Luke's description of the communal lifestyle

(Acts 4:32-5:7), in which “everything they owned was held in common” (4:32), is an excellent picture of this temporary between now and eternity lifestyle. But since Jesus had not yet returned, these devout Thessalonian believers had nothing with which to take care of such basic needs as food for themselves.

Paul describes them as “walking idly” (v. 6) and as “being busybodies” (v. 11), and he exhorts them to “do their own work quietly and to earn their own living” (v. 12). It appears that their offenses may have been particularly institutional ones: lazy, obnoxious, and getting in the way of others. It was not just that they ate the “bread of others without paying for it,” (v. 8) but they were actively keeping others from doing the work of the community.

The complex translations of both the literal terms and what they meant in that context indicates that perhaps the biggest issue was a sense of spiritual sloth. Sloth is often thought of as merely being physically lazy: not willing to get up off of the couch and do essential chores. But the church throughout the ages includes a refusal to take your faith seriously, to invest time and effort into understanding what you believe and the consequences that such beliefs have, or should have, upon your life. Two consequences of this spiritual sloth are an inability to mature in faith and to enjoy the benefits that come with such maturity.

These busybodies thought that the terms and conditions of following Jesus guaranteed them food and shelter without work. They did not need to mature. They did not act as if they had any obligation to their fellow believers, much less to humanity in general.

The church then, and now, has to learn to live in the world of the “not yet.” The Kingdom of God is here but not yet fully realized.

While this might seem like an archaic situation, there are many T&Cs of following Jesus that are still universally applicable today.

A key challenge from this text could be whether we accept or decline the T&C Jesus Christ lays out before us, and whether we fully understand those conditions.

Let’s go back to the early gospel accounts which describe the call to discipleship. In Matthew (4:19), for example, Jesus invites Simon and Andrew with the words, “Follow me,” and the writer reports that “immediately they left their nets and followed him.” This call apparently came without the “trigger warnings” that we expect today. There was no statement of the potential side effects of such an action, no disclaimer of consequences and no limitations of liability. There was simply the command, “Follow me.”

But there was more to this bargain, wasn't there? Jesus did not simply ask his disciples to follow him; he warned them, saying, "If any want to become my disciples, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24).

There were consequences to clicking "I Accept" on the Jesus' "app," and those consequences were, and are, frighteningly real.

A cross is involved. The social and political cost of identifying with Christ was real, and the injunction to "take up your cross" was no mere metaphor. We are incredibly blessed in this country that taking up the cross of Jesus is often mere metaphor. Yet there are many believers through out the world for whom this is a real choice to be made; for whom following Jesus can be a life threatening commitment.

Matthew further records the words of Jesus: "For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for my sake will save it."

Paul addresses an aspect of spiritual sloth in 1 Corinthians 13:3: If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Yes, we can sell all that we have and share it with those most in need. We can store up treasure in heaven that will not mold and can not be stolen. But if we do it without love, then we have nothing and gain nothing.

I just received a new credit card with its pages of terms and conditions. I did read through the pages; well, almost all of the pages. It seemed to me that the first few clauses were pretty ho-hum: nothing new there. But toward the end there were a few surprises that might actually apply to a situation that I might find myself in. I wonder if they were intentionally buried knowing that most people would never get that far?

I will not say that there is a priority to all of the things that we accept when we state that we have heeded the call to follow Jesus. But I do believe that we need to keep that passage from 1 Corinthians about doing everything out of love at the forefront of all that we do in the name of Jesus.

Even if you did not read and accept all of the terms and conditions that Scripture includes in our simple affirmative response to Follow Jesus, relax. The owner of those rights has also added an incredible clause, also binding upon both parties: John 3:16: For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son so that all who believe in him should not perish but have eternal life. And it continues: For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the

world might be saved through him. God is not trying to trick us with all sorts of legalize nor give cause to revoke our eternal benefits that are ours by faith. God's love for us, made manifest through grace, grants us everything that we need.

As I discussed this sermon with a friend, she told me about a young niece who grew up in a church attending family. The niece had sat down with the minister and they had discussed, for over an hour, what it meant to follow Jesus; in effect, all of the terms and conditions that come with committing to follow Christ. When the 13 year old niece was pointedly asked if she was ready to accept Jesus as her savior she said: "No!" It took her a year of struggle with what she had been told to finally decide that she was ready to accept these terms and conditions and follow Jesus.

The problem is that all too often we do not know the cost of commitment. Or perhaps we have forgotten the price. Or have, through spiritual sloth, been unwilling to put effort into maturing our faith. In our comfort we have not taken the cross and its consequences, the effects it should have upon our lives, into our workplace, nor in our care of God's creation, nor our politics nor ... nor so many other aspects of our lives.

Jesus' call to the Galilean fishermen was to follow him. Jesus' call to us is to do the same. We can do this, but do we accept the terms and conditions? Do we know what they are? And if we do, are we still willing to follow, surrender all and not count the cost?

My prayer is that through God's grace and encouragement we might strive to more closely follow Jesus as we join our voices with Isaiah: "Give thanks to the Lord, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the peoples, proclaim that his name is exalted. Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid."