

Getting Self Out of the Way

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Mat 16:21 From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.

Mat 16:22 Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.

Mat 16:23 But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.

Mat 16:24 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, **If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.**

Mat 16:25 **For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.**

In a very important way, the Savior here lays down the clear boundary between true disciples and nominal Christians. There has been a lot of commentary written about His statement here, and a good bit of speculation. But, what we do know and learn when we let His words sink in is that He has carefully defined what being one of His disciples means...what it takes.

The road of discipleship in Jesus' day was guaranteed to be a really tough one. Those who became His disciples met with some really strong rejection by their culture and religious community since they lived among Jews. So, the challenge to these first disciples was certainly large. Well, today, we live in a different culture and the things or people that challenge us about being the Lord's disciples are a little different. Those things which would discourage us from the path are things like: living the good life and enjoying all the fleshly gratifications that are available to us, pursuing the wealthy life and getting lots of material possessions and money to enjoy, living the family life, surrounded by our loved ones and pursuing all the things that families do together. Yes, all these things can present to us the opportunity to please self, gratify self, fulfil self. Having that power, they become challenges to the Lord's teaching that if we are to be His disciples we are to deny self and take up our cross and follow Him.

Let me say here that denying self and taking up our cross and following Christ does not mean we have permission to abandon our responsibilities, or abandon our families, or abandon our duties to society (as far as those duties agree with the Christian ethic), but it does mean prioritizing the things in our lives so that being a disciple of Jesus Christ, in the sense of our text, comes first. That being said, I want us to think today about denying self and taking up our cross in the light of what self represents and what denying that self demands.

I. Self wants everything for itself

- ❖ This self is what we call "the flesh"
- ❖ Self seeks its own praise and glory
- ❖ Self hungers for personal recognition
- ❖ Self seeks pleasure and satisfaction for the flesh

II. Self will take over and drive behavior

- ❖ Self will obviously drive fleshly behavior
- ❖ But flesh sometimes drives what appears to be spiritual behavior (but is really not)
 - I was reminded by someone I spoke to that people sometimes go to church just because of appearances or to keep up a reputation
 - Some people perform religious activities because what they are doing gives **self-satisfaction and self-accomplishment**
 - When I was a kid, Vacation Bible School gave us kids a chance to get some good cookies and kool-aid and to play with other kids – **self-satisfaction**
 - Today, going to church can help people socialize, especially those who work in a limited environment all week – **self-satisfaction**
 - I know a guy who loves to do construction. He goes to South America every year and builds houses as a mission project. Is he going as an act of denying himself or is he going as an act of fulfilling the love he has for building?
 - Let me be very clear here to state that there's nothing wrong with loving what we do for the Lord. But, I am saying that we as humans sometimes get spiritually confused about whether we are doing it for Christ or whether we are doing it for **self-fulfillment**.
 - A good way for the Lord's people to learn the difference between religious things done for self-fulfillment and religious things done for unselfish service to Christ is to intentionally take on something in the way of service to Christ that they know they do not like to do; or take on something that is going to cost you time you wanted to use elsewhere in some personal thing; or take on something that is going to cost you some money you had hoped to spend on something for yourself...and try doing it without griping or resenting.
 - Self hinders and opposes the spiritual person that is in us
 - **Gal 5:17** For the **flesh lusteth against the Spirit**, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.

III. Christ's wording suggests that we will have a struggle and there will be a burden to it: "let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me"

- ❖ "Deny himself" has the idea of telling self "no"
 - Parents spend a lot of time at WalMart telling their young folks "no." When do they do that? When they are denying those kids something they are asking them to buy. A kid at WalMart or in a candy aisle is almost a perfect allegory for the self each of us has. That self is always saying, "I want this." If we are seeking to be our Lord's disciples in deed, we are saying "no" to self all the time.
- ❖ "Deny himself" has the idea of withholding from self that which self lusts after
- ❖ "Take up his cross" has the idea of shouldering a burden (it is a burden to force **yourself** to give up what it craves, what fulfills it, what satisfies it, what puts it in command)

IV. This statement of Christ is the fork in the road that separates the true disciple from those who are simply unwilling to make the sacrifice and shoulder the burden

- ❖ Being a Christian in name only is easy as long as you don't have to give up anything
- ❖ Making a sacrifice by saying no to your own selfish goals and wants is the hard part that separates the wheat from the chaff – chaff cannot be wheat, and wheat is not chaff

- ❖ If we never challenge ourselves about which way we will go at the fork in the road – guess what – we are not true disciples, because if the flesh – self- is always given what it wants, there’s no doubt which direction we are going.
 - John wrote a very pithy statement about this very thing: **1John 2:16** For all that *is* in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is **of the world.**

V. I want to close with a word about the last words of Jesus in our text: **Mat. 16:25** For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.

- ❖ A believer’s life that is spent serving self will bring that believer to an end that is empty...an end that has no value to it...an end in which when that believer inventories his/her life, he/she will be forced to conclude that the life was absolutely wasted.
- ❖ Believers who sacrifice self-interest wherever and whenever they are called upon to do so in order to serve the Lord will be able to inventory their lives and conclude with satisfaction and joy that they had found the right life, the right way of living it, and will have no regrets born of wasting a life on self-interests.
- ❖ We have the right and privilege to pursue some things that relate to self-interest, but when those things conflict with our Christian duty and privilege, we must refuse to choose the things of self over the things of service to our Lord.