

The Commands of Christ

Sermon # 24

“Deny Yourself”

Matthew 16:24

We live in a day of "casual Christianity." I heard someone recently say that the average church could drop one fourth of its members from the membership roll and neither the church nor the dropped members would notice any difference.

Casual Christians are those who want to be numbered among the Flock, but could care less about following the Shepherd. They want the forgiveness the cross of Christ brings but never intend to carry their own cross. They want warm, fuzzy moments on Sunday mornings but offer no commitment to Jesus on Monday mornings. In short, they want the crown without the cross.

“Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. (25)”For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. (26)”For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”

The next command that we want to examine (there are actually two of them) are found in verse twenty four, where Jesus says, *“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself (aparnesastho), and take up his cross, and follow Me (akoloutheitho).*

In this passage Jesus lays out the principle of discipleship, when he says, *“If anyone would come after me.”* We are not allowed to come to God on our own terms we must come to Him on His terms. To those who had not yet placed their faith in Jesus His words, *“come after me”* can be applied to the initial decision to surrender their lives to Christ for salvation. To those who have already placed their faith in Jesus for salvation, the call to *“come after me”* is a renewal of a call to a life of daily obedience to Christ. This is necessary because we are all under the constant temptation to take back what was given up and to reclaim what was forsaken. It is altogether possible to again place one’s own will above God’s and to take back rights which were relinquished to him.

Here Jesus says if you are going to *“come after me”* here is what you must do.

First, The Disciple is Called to Lay Something Down – Deny Himself “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself...”

It is important to understand that Jesus does not mean what we usually think of as “self-denial.” By this we usually mean that we are giving up something. It is like how some

Christian's observe Lent, by giving up something, perhaps it is the giving up of a bad habit in life, or up something really important like, "I am going to give up, wearing my "Bullwinkle the Moose" Houseshoes. That is not the Jesus talking about. He is not only concerned with what we do, but even more importantly what we are. Therefore he is not talking about denying ourselves luxuries or even necessities, but about "denying self" with is entirely different. Denying self means that we renounce our right to ourselves, the right to rule our own lives.

The phrase "deny himself" literally means, "*to completely disown, to utterly separate oneself from someone.*" It is the same word used to describe Peter's denial of Jesus outside the high priests home, Matt. 26:34! Each time he was confronted about his connection with Jesus, Peter more fervently denied knowing him (vv. 70, 72, 74).

The disciple is to utterly disown himself, to refuse to acknowledge the self of the old man.

- We are to count the old man as being dead, (Rom. 6:11).
- We are to make no provision for the flesh.

(Rom. 13:14).

- To deny oneself means to follow the example set forth by the Lord Jesus Himself in coming to this world. (Phil. 2:5-8).
- We are to live our lives as one alive to God, but dead to sin and to the world, Gal. 2:20.

What does all this mean in a practical sense? Someone has said it this way, "*If when you are good, evil is spoken, and when your wishes are crossed and your advice is disregarded, and your opinions are ridiculed and you refuse to let anger rise in your heart, and even defend yourself' but you take it patiently in loving silence, then you are dying to self. And when you lovingly and patiently bear any disgrace, any irregularity, any annoyance, when you stand face to face with extravagance and folly and spiritual insensitivity and endure it, as Jesus did, that is dying to self. And when you are content with any food, any money, any clothing, any society, any solitude or interruption by the will of God, that is dying to self. And when you never care to refer to yourself in conversation or record your own good works, or itch after commendation from others, and when you truly love to be unknown, that is dying to self. When you see you brother prosper, see his needs wondrously met, and can honestly rejoice with him [with his big house, with big car, with his big pool – whatever it may be] without feeling envy, and never question God though your needs are greater and still unmet, that is dying to self. Now when you can receive correction and reproof from someone of less stature, and admit that he is right and find no resentment or rebellion in your heart, that is dying to self.*"[As quoted by Craig Giannini. "Gaining by Losing." www.dcn.davis.ca.us/~gvcc/sermon_trans/Gain_by_Losing.htm.]

It sounds hard because it is hard! Self does like to be denied, but until it is, we cannot possibly follow after Jesus like He desires for us to!

“Fred Craddock, in an address to ministers, caught the practical implications of consecration. “To give my life for Christ appears glorious,” he said. “To pour myself out for others. . . to pay the ultimate price of martyrdom—I’ll do it. I’m ready, Lord, to go out in a blaze of glory.”

“We think giving our all to the Lord is like taking a \$1,000 bill and laying it on the table—‘Here’s my life, Lord. I’m giving it all.’ “But the reality for most of us is that he sends us to the bank and has us cash in the \$1,000 for quarters. We go through life putting out 25 cents here and 50 cents there. Listen to the neighbor kid’s troubles instead of saying, ‘Get lost.’ Go to a committee meeting. Give a cup of water to a shaky old man in a nursing home.”

“Usually giving our life to Christ isn’t glorious. It’s done in all those little acts of love, 25 cents at a time. It would be easy to go out in a flash of glory; it’s harder to live the Christian life little by little over the long haul.”

[Darryl Bell - www.bible.org/illus/nt/nt-71.htm]

The Disciple is Called to Lay Something Down – Deny Himself and...

Secondly, The Disciple Is Called To Lift Something Up – Take Up His Cross - "If anyone desires to come after Me ... let him ... take up his cross..."

To understand what this cross Jesus refers to is, we need to talk about what it isn't. It isn't your lost husband or wife. It isn't your wayward children. It isn't your ding-a-ling neighbor. Your cross isn't your difficulties, your health or the bad situations you face in life. We say *“that’s my cross,”* but it is not! That is not what Jesus meant. The cross is not just a place of suffering, it is a place of death!

When Jesus spoke of the cross everyone in his audience knew what he was referring to.

John MacArthur writes: *“...the cross was a very concrete and vivid reality. It was the instrument of execution reserved for Rome’s worst enemies. It was a symbol of the torture and death that awaited those who dared raise a hand against Roman authority. Not many years before Jesus and the disciples came to Caesarea Philippi, 100 men had been crucified in the area. A century earlier, Alexander Janneus had crucified 800 Jewish rebels at Jerusalem, and after the revolt that followed the death of Herod the Great, 2,000 Jews were crucified by the Roman proconsul Varus. Crucifixions on a smaller scale were a common sight, and it has been estimated that perhaps some 30,000 occurred under Roman authority during the lifetime of Christ.”*

[John MacArthur. “The MacArthur New Testament Commentary.” Matthew 16-23. (Moody: Chicago, 1988) p. 49]

When Jesus says that we are to take up our cross, He is saying that we are to live as dead men. We are called upon to take up that cross, once for all, and go after Jesus. We are not to back out, turn around, or lay down the cross. We are to die on that cross, giving our all for His glory! This phrase has the idea of being willing to go all the way for Jesus - no holds barred and no turning back - just a steady, humble walk that follows His footsteps and His path through this world. Jesus said it as simply as it could possibly be said, John 12:26, "*If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor.*" (NKJV)

The Disciple Is Called To Lift Something Up – Take Up His Cross and...

Third, The Disciple Is Called To Live Something Out – Follow Me - "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him ... follow Me."

Here Jesus says, literally "let him follow me day by day." To be a disciple of Christ is to be continually following after Jesus. It is a way of life. It is to be your pattern for living.

Let me make one more point and then we close. If a disciple is a "*follower*" and we are disciples of Christ, it follows that that we are willing to be lead. We are willing to be led into places that we don't understand; even places that are dark and scary and even painful and unpleasant; because we trust and follow the Shepherd.

The Psalmist says in, "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. (2) He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. (3) He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake. (4) Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. (5) You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. (6) Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the LORD Forever."

Jesus words in verse twenty-four can be paraphrased this way, "If anyone wished to be counted as an adherent of mine, he must once and for all say farewell to self, decisively accept pain and shame and persecution for my sake and in my cause, and must then follow and keep on following me as my disciple." [William Henriksen. New Testament Commentary. Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973) p. 656]