

[Luk 9:23] *And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. [Joh 12:25] "He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal.*

Perhaps one of the most basic and consistent messages which Jesus gave repeatedly to His disciples was the message concerning the cost of discipleship. All four gospels record this basic call to discipleship along with honest explicit warnings concerning the costs of following Christ.

When we are first confronted with the claims of Christ as well as later, when we are first born again, we think that these warnings concerning the cost of discipleship are related to the sins of the flesh which need to be forsaken. Then we think that denying ourselves is refusing to lie, cheat, steal, hate, murder, and or live immorally. Of course, those parts of the old way of living need to be dropped as we enter into the call to be children of God. But, that is only the beginning.

Soon we discover that denying ourselves includes dealing with ungodly attitudes as like selfishness, unforgiveness, envy, lust, self-centeredness, pride, and similar fleshly uglies. The searchlight of the Spirit is relentless in it's search and these 'lesser' character flaws are exposed. We can hide, but the light follows us into hiding. The Spirit is unwilling for us to escape into darkness.....again..... and so self-denial and the cross necessarily become a daily thing. Luke records that Jesus *was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me."* [That means this applies to'everyone' and minimally... 'daily'.]

But, the war is not ended with a few victories over those few above-mentioned 'character flaws'. It has only begun. In time we begin to realize that our greatest enemy is not the devil, but that old nature which still wants to reign as god at least in our little area of the world. That deep deep persistent lie concerning our right to god-hood is the driving force behind of all the lesser sins which we have been working on in above paragraphs.

When Jesus said that we must deny ourselves He was saying more than that we need to deny the lusts of our flesh and those various ugly sin appetites. He was really addressing our core sin problem, namely 'self'! The cross of Christ is the instrument of that death. In HIM we die to 'self' which is the rebel-god who causes us to desire and pursue those various lusts of the flesh. Frequently, as Christians, we attempt to deal with our rebel-fruit

rather than the rebel living within us. This is the essential battle of the disciple.

This inner “I WANT TO BE GOD THING” is what the Bible calls '*sin*' [Rom.6:14] OR '*the sin nature*' or '*flesh*' which is responsible for releasing the wide variety of sins which we “*daily*” need to nail down [to the cross].

The spotlight of the Spirit reveals to us that the “I WANT TO BE GOD THING” is still alive and functioning within us - even among spiritually alive born-again Christians. Frequently the spirit-man is being pushed aside so that the natural man – the soul can run the show. It is the soulish man who is ruled by his mind, will, and emotions. In the born-again Christian this is accomplished by silencing the spirit-man and chaining him by the darkened and futile functioning of the unregenerate mind. Paul said, “*So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart...*” [Eph 4:17] These words, affirmed “*together with the Lord*”, are addressed to the early CHURCH ...and to the church throughout the ages. I think that this “*futility of [the] mind*” and “*being darkened in understanding*” is simply the rule of the soul-man which naturally and obviously is existent in the unregenerate man but it also remains active in the Christian. Therefore it is necessary for the Christian to daily deny himself, embrace the cross, and with a renewed resurrected determination, follow after the Savior.

In these last deeply darkened days the need for self-denial, the cross, and following the voice of the Savior has become, if possible, even more of a priority than it ever was. We need to consider even more seriously the words of Jesus who said, “*He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal.*” [Jn.12:25]

I believe that Jesus was speaking specifically to the “I WANT TO BE GOD THING” when He spoke of one “loving his life” or “hating his life in this world”. This call to discipleship is not just a call to distance ourselves from lying, stealing, hating, lusting, greed, or bitterness. It is a call to live according to and under the rule of the spirit-man as he is being led by the SPIRIT of GOD rather than according to the lusts and desires of the natural man.

I believe that God is calling us to forsake the operations, lusts, and desires of the natural-man and to be spiritually alive sons and daughters of God who are not only BORN OF THE SPIRIT, BUT WHO ARE SO SPIRITUALLY ALERT THAT THEY

ARE CONTINUALLY BEING MOTIVATED BY THAT SPIRIT-MAN AS HE IS BEING INSTRUCTED, LED, AND INSPIRED BY HOLY SPIRIT.

The discipleship call which Jesus presented in all four gospels deals with a lot more than a few external sins. It is far more central to our existence in time and eternity than a few bad attitudes or character flaws or even certain sins of commission or omission. **It has to do with the heart more than the emotions, the spirit more than the mind.** Ultimately, it has to do with our destiny as sons of God.

When we are born of the Spirit, our spirit-man becomes alive as it merges into one together with Holy Spirit. According to Jesus, until a man is born-again by the Spirit he can neither see nor enter the kingdom of God. [Jn.3:3-5] But when he is born again he is alive –serving the King – and able to hear and learn, but – even then – he is not born fully mature in understanding or ability. That growth occurs as he hears and obeys his Lord over the unceasing strivings of that **self** who still wants to be god. The war is fought against, the already well established, controlling, natural man, who continually resists and wars against NEW-BORN spirit-man. The old ways of thinking and of doing things **MUST** be replaced by the God-way in this New Creature in Christ. That is why the cost of discipleship was and is so costly and painful to every child of God. That is why it is necessary to deny ourselves, embrace the cross to follow HIM.

This is one of the most basic truths of the Christian faith and it is growing increasingly vital to know and walk in it. Tune in, the Shepherd is calling...

[Joh 10:27-28] **"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.**

Tune in, the Shepherd is still speaking to His sheep..... Tune in and follow HIM..... He is your life and destiny.

George