

SELF DENIAL

(HAVE YOU TAKEN UP YOUR CROSS?)

By: Phillip Hayes

And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me [Mark 8:35]

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me [Galatians 2:20]

We are truly saved by Grace and not by our works. But, we are also saved through our faith! "*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast*" [Ephesians 2:8-9]. God's Grace draws us to Him. It is the goodness of God that leads men to repentance (See Romans 2:4).

It takes God's Grace, our faith, and our obedience to be saved! We find God's Grace is our teacher. You may not have thought of Grace this way, but Grace actually teaches us works. Grace teaches us to live holy! "*For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,*

Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world" [Titus 2:11-12].

James wrote, *"Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works" [James 2:17-18].* It should be obvious you cannot have one without the other! Although you are saved by Grace, it takes your faith to believe. If you have faith, it will produce works.

With that settled in our minds let's continue. Today, we hear much teaching and preaching of the gospel of grace, faith and prosperity, but seldom do you hear a message on denying oneself.

Jesus taught that if you were going to be a Christian, you would first have to deny yourself! He taught there was a cross to bear if you were going to follow Him. His teaching is abundantly clear. During this message you will find why He taught such a radical message and why it is extremely important that you understand it.

I realize a message about denying oneself is not and will never be a popular message. However, I do believe every truly born again Christian will desire a closer relationship with the Lord. Also, they have a burning in their heart to reach others with the glorious Gospel that delivered them and gave them a new life.

Many years ago I read a little tract that had this title, "Like Him in Consecration – Like Him in Power". I thought, "That's the truth! That's the answer to anyone seeking to manifest His power".

Let's look at a scripture I had questioned the meaning of for years: *"And he went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem. Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said*

unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able" [Luke 13:22-24].

"Many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able."

This scripture always bothered me. He is saying many will actually try to find salvation and not be able to find it! Why? How could this possibly be in our generation when you have radio, television, the internet and countless articles, tracts and Bibles available in our nation and throughout most of the world?

It was revealed to me that the reason was compromise!

The true Gospel has been compromised and watered down so much it is barely recognizable in comparison to the original Gospel preached by the Apostles and early church. As Paul once declared, *"some would pervert the gospel of Christ."* He said some was preaching another Jesus, and another gospel, which was a perversion of the true gospel (See Galatians 1:6; 2Corinthians 11:4).

Isn't it a shame that many in our generation that actually want to be saved are not able to find the Truth!? Think about it! Who should a man believe today? With thousands of denominations and organizations teaching they have the truth, yet they all oppose one another, which one should you believe? The Bible teaches there is only one church; one Lord, one faith, and one baptism! Certainly there is only One Gospel! With all the confusion in modern Christianity one would certainly be hard pressed to find the Truth!

Jesus called the way of salvation, *"The straight gate."* And, He said we should strive (*which means to struggle, contend, fight, labor fervently*) to enter into it! Compared to today's "good news gospel"; no repentance, just believe and say the "sinner's prayer" sounds as foreign as a duck in the desert. Self denial, strive, struggle, contend . . . We don't

find that kind of commitment to Christ preached today!

It may surprise you to know that Jesus lived a sold out humble lifestyle! Further, He taught the same for all that would seek to follow Him! His message was one of forsaking all and taking up the cross.

To follow Christ is to follow His example, is it not? What kind of example did He leave us? First of all He demonstrated the way of self denial! The definition of the word Christian is: a follower of Christ; to follow His ways; to be Christ-like.

Before Jesus began His ministry, we find Him separating Himself and fasting forty days and nights in the wilderness. During His ministry, we find Him many times going up into the mountains to pray. We find Him travailing in prayer, while others were sleeping. He existed only to please the Father! His meat (his life) was to do the will of the Father.

He was teaching His disciples "the way" through His own sacrifice! The Law was, *"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength"*. Jesus demanded just that of whosoever would follow Him. Nothing less than total devotion would please Him.

How strange this all sounds to modern ears, but yet there is much stranger teaching to come . . . Listen to our Lord's preaching in Luke chapter fourteen: *"If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, Saying, This man began to build and*

was not able to finish. Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be aboe with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple" [Luke14:26-33].

Jesus is clearly teaching there is a cost to serve Him. Children of God, no matter what anyone says, Jesus said what He meant, and He meant what He said! This is the straight gate! This is His teaching! Look at His demand! You cannot allow you father, mother, wife, children, brothers, or sisters stand before you and the Lord! If you place your own life's ambitions and goals before Christ, you cannot be His disciple! Jesus wants your complete surrender and devotion to Him! Jesus preached that there was a price to pay in following Him. Jesus wanted His disciples to be prepared as they would be hated of all men! *"And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake" [Luke 21:17].* Believe it or not, if you truly follow Him, you will be hated!

He preached that no one intending to build a tower, would not first sit down and count the cost to see if he had enough to finish it. And then He said, *"So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple."*

There is that penetrating statement again, *"He cannot be my disciple"!* Jesus used it three times in these eight verses. Jesus is teaching that it is going to cost you something if you want to truly serve Him! I would be willing to venture you never considered there was a cost when you started your relationship with the Lord! However, it is common knowledge that multiplied millions have died for

our Lord! Not only does the Bible itself state the sacrifices of many, history itself records the sacrifice of millions of Christians. In New Testament times; in the early church; and during the dark ages multitudes were burned alive at the stake, used as human torches to lighten the gardens of Nero, beheaded and killed with the sword. In modern times we have seen many beheaded and burned alive for being a Christian in Muslim controlled countries. How could these multiplied millions freely surrender their lives to such a horrible end? They could not have unless they had first sacrificed themselves to the Lord Jesus Christ!

Jesus knew beforehand the sufferings that many would endure for following Him! The only way to prepare them was to demand their total commitment to Him. His love for them was His motivation in preaching self-denial to those who would choose to follow Him.

I know this all sounds strange to many of you, but I also know some of you reading this article have already experienced the loss and rejection from people you loved because you chose to follow the Lord with all your heart.

Let's look at some more of our Lord's preaching concerning discipleship and denying oneself.

"And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his souls?" [Mark 8:34-37].

Clearly, His message was the same. If you were going to be His disciple, the price was forsaking all!

Christ came with a message of absolutes! There was no compromise. If you wanted to be saved, He had the

message that would save you. His message was simple . . . hate anything that would stand between you and Him, forsake all, deny yourself, take up the cross (live a crucified life), and then follow His lifestyle as your example.

"Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me" [Matthew 10:34-38].

Here, we find the Prince of Peace declaring boldly that He was bringing a sword to the world and not peace. His message alienated families. He said, *"A man's foes (enemies) will be they of his own household."* He warned all who sought to follow Him that you could have no one before Him. If you loved your parents or children more than you loved Him, you were not worthy of Him. If you wouldn't deny yourself, you were not worthy of Him. Again, His message was self-denial!

His message was the same to the rich and the poor! A rich young man came to Jesus and asked Him what he should do to have eternal life The Lord told the young man to keep the commandments. The young man said, *"All these have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?"*

Our Lord's answer to this young man was no different than His answer to everyone. Remember, His message was clear, *"So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple."* The "whosoever" included the rich, the poor, the young and the

old. Look at His command to this man: *"Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me"* [Matthew 19:21].

Jesus knew what was in this rich young man's heart. Although he was a religious man, he had kept the commandments, but riches his God! *"The love of money is the root of all evil . . ."* [1Timothy 6:10].

Friends, He knows your heart also! Would you sell all you have to obtain a perfect relationship with the Lord? Another question I must ask is, "If you knew the only way you could be saved was to sell all your possessions and give them to the poor, would you do it?"

I hope you see by now that God is dealing with the heart! I have heard people testify in church how they loved Jesus with all their heart and how they would die for Him. Yet in reality, they wouldn't give a dollar for the cause of Christ or lay down a pack of cigarettes for Him! How can you say you would die for the Lord, when you won't even live for Him? Very few today are dedicated to prayer and fasting. Some of you reading this message have probably never fasted over three days, and have never read the Bible throughout. People have a heart problem, not a devil problem!

Where is your heart? Right now, if you will admit it, you are having an extremely hard time fasting and praying. You are feeling the pressures of the world now more than ever before. You are up one day and down the next. When church time rolls around, it seems a thousand voices tell you all the reasons you shouldn't go. Sometimes (and without a renewed dedication, it will be most times) you just don't want to go to church. You are more lukewarm, cold, and worldly now than any other time in your Christian walk. As a matter of fact, a lot of you have very recently feared that

you might altogether backslide; unless something very drastic happens in your walk with God. Wake up! Take inventory of your life! Perhaps you need to fall in love with Jesus all over again!

Children of God, the pressure is going to get worse! Satan is about to be unleashed upon this world in full fury! Revelation 12:12-13 tells us, *"Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time. And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child."* Persecution and spiritual war is coming!

You can say what you like, but you haven't waged battle with Satan yet! Most of your fight is with your own lusts and desires; your flesh! Folks, you better wake up! Spiritual War as you have never encountered is ahead of us!

The greatest spiritual conflict ever to be wrought is about to begin, and we all need a greater commitment to Christ.

Jesus prepared His disciples to do battle with the enemy.

Peter, James, John, Paul and all the other early leaders of the church prepared the people to fight. The church world today has glorified herself and is living deliciously, and says in her heart, *"I sit as a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow,"* (see Revelation 18:7). While the majority of church folks wait for an escape from any persecution or tribulation, there is a remnant preparing for the war that is coming. Those that are hearing from God are not fearful, but are looking forward to the battle of the ages! They know the Lord Jesus Christ, has all power in Heaven and Earth, and through His power, we will soon put Satan under our feet.

These soon to be manifested saints are sold out! Wealth means nothing! Possessions mean nothing! They love God more than wives, husbands, children, or parents! They

have forsaken all! They have denied themselves and lost their lives. They have no ambitions other than to please God. They are determined to follow the Lamb wherever He goes.

I believe God is speaking loud and clear to those that have an ear to hear. You are about to see carpenters lay down their hammers, plumbers and mechanics are going to lay down their wrenches, builders are going to build their last house. God is speaking to His chosen! Millionaires are going to sell out for Christ! This gospel of the Kingdom of God is going to be preached throughout the world! True ministers that have struggled in the past are suddenly going to have the finances to fulfill their ministries!

You may not believe this will happen. However, there is no doubt that millions over the years have sacrificed everything for the cause of Christ. Some of you are going to mock and laugh at brothers and sisters that obey Christ's message of self-denial. But, those same brothers and sisters will have the last laugh! The time is going to come when the money-god will fall! The scriptures will be fulfilled, and they will cast their gold and silver into the streets.

When the money-god falls many that refused to obey the Gospel will find themselves with thousands of worthless dollars stashed in banks. In that time, *"There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth"*! Mark my words! Overnight, the economies of America, China, Great Britain, Russia and Japan could easily crash. I have said many times, "America could become a third-world country overnight!"

The message that Jesus preached is once again being preached. God is seeking for men and women that will serve Him with all their heart.

Sadly, the church today is like Lot's wife. They keep looking back! Back at the world they left to serve the Lord.

Lot's wife loved her home, and her possessions more than she loved her life, (for her possessions had become her life), just as they may have with some of you.

The love of money is the root of all evil. The Apostle Paul warned: *"Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself. But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out."* [1Timothy 6:5-7]

Paul further said, *"And having food and raiment let us be therewith content"* [1Timothy 6:8]. *"But thou, O man of God, flee these things . . ."* [1Timothy 6:11].

Remember, Jesus taught His followers, *"Take no thought of tomorrow, what you shall eat or what you shall wear."* When He sent the seventy out, He sent them with no money, and only the clothing on their backs. When they returned rejoicing that the devils were subject to them, He asked them, *"Did you lack anything?"* They answered, *"No Lord."* Oh, how I wish all of you could see that this is His way! He wants men and women of faith to follow Him. Faith to believe that they need nothing but God! Faith to believe that the same God Who is able to save, heal and deliver is most assuredly powerful enough to meet all their needs.

The Apostle Paul actually gloried in the things he suffered as a man of God and a Christian! Today, most of us can shout and glory only when blessed with material gain!

Before we close this message, let's look at a few of this great man of God's statements concerning the life-style he lived. And remember, Paul said, *"Follow me as I follow Christ."*

"Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure,

in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not? If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities" [2Corinthians 23-30].

Some years back a popular prosperity teacher was actually stupid enough to preach if Paul had just believed and had faith, he would have been blessed and would not have had to endure the hardships he suffered.

With teaching like that in the kingdom, we don't need the devil as an adversary!

Preachers that make silly statements as that know nothing of a crucified life. Christians that attack others that are hearing from God to live according to the scriptures, are going to reap a terrible tragedy in these last days.

The Apostle Paul came to the place in God that he could boldly proclaim, *"It is not I that liveth, but Christ."* Can you honestly say the same? Have you died, that He might live? Have you denied yourself, that He might be your all in all? Have you decreased, that He might increase?

"For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory

of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are alway delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. So then death worketh in us, but life in you" [2Corinthians 4:5-12].

Paul's desire was to obey! His message and his life was Christ. He was truly a walking, talking, breathing, Jesus man! The treasure that was in him was Christ. Although he was persecuted and troubled on every side, He was not distressed! His joy was in his God! His hope was in Christ! His focus was Jesus only and nothing else mattered. His life was death . . . Children I hope you can see the example Paul left us. He followed the crucified life style of Christ. Satan had nothing in him, and the world had no hold on him. His desires for pleasures, things, and money were crucified. You can also achieve this glorious life-style!

The lure of the world has deceived multitudes. We think that God is only with us when things go our way . . . Oh, what fools a lot of us have been. Jesus wants us to buffet the flesh, crucify it! You want to pamper it, feed it and comfort it. Our ways are certainly not His ways.

Ministers should form their lives as the Apostle Paul instructed in Second Corinthians: *"Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed: But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings; By pureness, by knowledge, by*

longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, By the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true; As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things" [2Corinthians 6:3-10].

Paul is warning ministers that sufferings will be their bedfellow. *"That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death" [Philippians 3:10].*

Peter also commended the saints in his epistle, *"But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy" [1 Peter 4:13].* Have you partaken of Christ's sufferings? You have probably never heard anyone bring this to your attention.

I believe the end is near! The hour of deliverance for the world is here! Jesus is about to be revealed from Heaven taking vengeance on them that know not God and that obey not the gospel. Revival is at the door, the Masters' calling His chosen, and He is saying the same as in the beginning .

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"COME . . . ,

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