

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 6-21-15 PM NOTES
“DENYING SELF TO FOLLOW CHRIST”
MARK 8:34
#2 in Series, “Following Jesus”

Matthew 4:19 (NKJV) “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.”

1 John 3:2b (NKJV) “...we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”

1 Corinthians 11:1 (KJV) “Be ye followers of me, even as I also *am* of Christ.”

“I am more afraid of pope ‘self’ than of the Pope of Rome and all his cardinals.”

—Martin Luther

I. The Meaning of Denying Self

Matthew 26:69-70 (NKJV) “⁶⁹ Now Peter sat outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came to him, saying, ‘You also were with Jesus of Galilee.’ ⁷⁰ But he denied it before *them* all, saying, ‘I do not know what you are saying.’”

Acts 7:35a (NASB) “This Moses whom they disowned...”

Acts 7:35a (NKJV) “This Moses whom they rejected...”

The flesh speaks of a self-focused, self-empowered, self-centered, self-elevated life. It is fed by the programming of the now-crucified-with-Christ old man in Adam and it is this flesh that cannot please God (Romans 8:8). When we use the phrase “dying to self” and the phrase “crucifying the flesh” we are saying almost the same thing.

“Over and over again the Holy Spirit brings us to the place which in evangelical language is called ‘full surrender’. Remember what full surrender is. It is not giving up this thing and that, but the deliberate giving up of my right to my individual self. As long as we are slaves to our ideas of individuality we distort the presentation of our Lord’s teaching about discipleship.”
—Oswald Chambers

Galatians 2:20 (NKJV) “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (NKJV) “¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit *who is* in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? ²⁰ For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.”

John 5:19b (NKJV) “Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself...”

John 5:30 (NKJV) “I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.”

John 6:38 (NKJV) “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.”

John 8:28 (NKJV) “Then Jesus said to them, ‘When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am *He*, and *that* I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things.’”

John 8:50 (NKJV) “And I do not seek My *own* glory; there is One who seeks and judges.”

“The parting with my wife and poor children hath often been to me in this place, as the pulling [of] the flesh from my bones; and that not only because I am somewhat fond of these great mercies, but also because I should have often brought to mind the many hardships, miseries, and wants that my poor family was like to meet with should I be taken from them, especially my poor blind child, who lay nearer my heart than all I had besides. Oh, the thought of the hardship I thought my blind one might go under, would break up my heart to pieces...But yet, recalling myself, thought I, I must venture you all with God, though it goeth to the quick to leave you; oh, I saw in this condition, I was a man who was pulling down his house upon the head of his wife and children; yet thought I, I must do it, I must do it.”
—John Bunyan

II. The Means of Denying Self

"[Holiness] is not something which we bring to God, or He bestows; it is simply *the sense of entire nothingness, which comes when we see how truly God is all, and in which we make way for Him to be all.*" —Andrew Murray

Romans 6:11 (NKJV) "Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

John 3:30 (NKJV) "He must increase, but I *must* decrease."

"God uses [people] who are weak and feeble enough to lean on Him."

—Hudson Taylor

1 Corinthians 15:31b (NKJV) "...I die daily."

A. Meditate on and Praise the Worthiness of Christ

"The only hope of decreasing self is an increasing Christ".

—F. B. Meyer

B. Begin Each Day Acknowledging Your Total Inability and His Ability

Romans 6:11 (NKJV) "Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

C. Ask the Holy Spirit to Search Your Life for Pride

1. Seeing other's sins as worse than yours
2. Anger when your goals are blocked
3. A spirit of competition in wanting to do and be better than others
4. An aversion to admitting you are wrong
5. Insensitivity to others
6. Worry, which is a manifestation of pride
7. Self pity

*Lord, bend that proud and stiffnecked I,
Help me to bow the head and die;
Beholding Him on Calvary,
Who bowed His head for me.*

—Roy Hession

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 6-21-15 PM
“DENYING SELF TO FOLLOW CHRIST”

MARK 8:34

#2 in Series, “Following Jesus”

In the first message in this series, we saw that the Christian life is best described by the phrase “following Jesus”. In fact, a more biblical description of what is commonly called “Christian” is “a follower of Christ”. We saw in the last message that when Christ called His disciples to Himself, He called them to follow Him. In **Matthew 4:19 (NKJV)** Jesus said, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” The calling of Jesus to our lives is not a calling to just “make a decision for Jesus”, but to be His disciple. The most accurate description of a disciple is “one who follows Christ”. We saw in the last message that there is a progression in following Christ. First, we must “desire to come after Him”. No one will become a Christ Follower until there is a desire in their heart. We saw that God is the source of that desire, but once we become a Christ follower, we cultivate that desire, intensify that desire to follow Him by getting the “appetite destroyers” out of our life, and putting “appetite enhancers” in our daily routines. Sin that is tolerated destroys our appetite for following Jesus. But appetite destroyers are not necessarily evil or sinful things; they can be good things that take an inordinate amount of our time and keep us from the best things. Appetite destroyers can be hobbies, TV, times with friends, and other things that simply suck up all of our time leaving little or no time for the best things. Appetite enhancers are the spiritual disciplines (intake of the Word, prayer, meditation on the Word), reading good books such as biographies of the heroes of the faith, sharing the Gospel, discipling others, and ministering to the hurting. The next part of that progression in following Jesus is denying self. That is what we are focusing on in this message. The third part of that progression is taking up our cross. That is what we will look at next week. Those who desire to come after Jesus, deny self, and take up their cross will then be followers of Jesus as a way of life. The glorious thing is that we never “arrive” in this following. There is a constant maturing and deepening in this journey of following Him that gets deeper and better until He comes or we go through physical death to be with Him and when that happens, **1 John 3:2b (NKJV)** says, “...we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”

In this message, we are focusing on denying self. The truth that I am sharing is radical, but I believe that it is biblical. The fact that what I am describing seems radical explains the sorry situation of the church and the lack of influence the church has on our culture today. It is this life characterized by denying self that paves the way for an unexplainable life. I believe that the reason our evangelism and cultural impact is so ineffective is because we have nothing unexplainable in our life. Most professing Christians live selfish, self centered lives no different than their neighbors or coworkers. If your Christian life can be explained in terms of your willpower, your talents, your courage, your hard work, your dedication, or “your” anything, you are self empowered and not Christ empowered. If your Christianity can be explained in terms of you, what have you got to offer your neighbor, coworker, or family beyond a good example? As they see it, the only difference between you and them is that Christianity is sort of like your hobby, but it’s not theirs. To invite them to come to Christ would be similar to inviting them to play a round of golf with you and they say, “No, thanks. I’m just not a golfer”. A life that is selfless and that is lived in total dependence on God has an unexplainable element to it. As God does amazing things in and through you as you go through life’s difficulties and trials it draws nonbelievers to you to ask a reason for the hope that dwells in you (1 Peter 3:15). The fact is that most professing Christians have been so “conformed to this world” that their lives are self centered and self empowered. Through the influence of pop psychology we have become more concerned with self-fulfillment, self esteem, self assertiveness, and self empowerment than we are self denial. Many in the public “Christian” limelight are open about refusing to talk about sin because that makes people feel bad about themselves and Christianity is presented as being all about making us feel better about ourselves. Human self centeredness has thus replaced self denial often with the blessing of the church.

My desire for this message is that it will bring about an intense hatred of the self life and a consuming hunger and thirst for a Christ filled, Christ empowered, unexplainable life that follows Jesus as a way of life. I long for us to be able to say to family, coworkers, friends, and acquaintances what Paul said to the

Corinthians in **1 Corinthians 11:1 (KJV)** “Be ye followers of me, even as I also *am* of Christ.” I long for us to have a deep loathing for the self life. I love what the reformer Martin Luther said about the self life. He said, “I am more afraid of pope ‘self’ than of the Pope of Rome and all his cardinals”. [Quoted in Wayne Mack, *Humility, the Forgotten Virtue*, page 10].

I. The Meaning of Denying Self

The Greek word translated “deny” is a strong term that was the same word used of Peter’s denial of Christ before He was crucified. **Matthew 26:69-70 (NKJV)** “⁶⁹ Now Peter sat outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came to him, saying, ‘You also were with Jesus of Galilee.’ ⁷⁰ But he **denied** it before *them* all, saying, ‘I do not know what you are saying.’” This word can be translated “disown” or “reject”. **Acts 7:35 (NASB)** “This Moses whom they disowned...” **Acts 7:35a (NKJV)** “This Moses whom they rejected...” To be a follower of Christ is to “disown” or “reject” or “deny” a self focused, self empowered life.

As it is used in this context, the word “self” is not a neutral term referring to our personhood or our humanity. It is used in a negative sense and is practically synonymous with the concept of the flesh. A good way to remember that connection is this: When you spell “self” backward and add an “h”, you have flesh. The flesh speaks of a self focused, self empowered, self centered, self elevated life. It is fed by the programming of the now crucified with Christ old man in Adam and it is this flesh that cannot please God (Romans 8:8). When we use the phrase “dying to self” and the phrase “crucifying the flesh” we are saying basically the same thing.

When we speak of denying self, we are really talking about a total surrender of our life to the Lord. For me, this is the best way to communicate what Jesus was saying in Mark 8:34. A paraphrase of **Mark 8:34b (NKJV)** could be, “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him totally surrender himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.” Technically, there is no such thing as “partial surrender”. To be partially surrendered to the Lord is to be unsundered. If I say I am partially surrendered, I am choosing what I will surrender and what I will not surrender and that makes me the one in total control. Exactly what do we mean by “surrender”? A song that used to be sung often at the end of services was “I Surrender All”. The chorus said,

*I surrender all, I surrender all;
All to Thee my blessed Savior,
I surrender all.*

- Judson W. Van DeVenter (1896)

What really does that mean? Oswald Chambers has a word we need to hear. “Over and over again the Holy Spirit brings us to the place which in evangelical language is called ‘full surrender’. Remember what full surrender is. It is not giving up this thing and that, but the deliberate giving up of my right to my individual self. As long as we are slaves to our ideas of individuality we distort the presentation of our Lord’s teaching about discipleship.” The Scripture that best embodies the concept of total surrender is **Galatians 2:20 (NKJV)** “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer **I** who live, but **Christ lives in me**; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” Surrender is when I stop telling God what I want and bow at His feet making myself available to do what He wants. Surrender is when I stop telling God what I think He should do and completely accept His will and His way in every situation. Surrender is in reality my surrender to the lordship of Jesus Christ. It is a testimony that I have no right to myself. Total surrender is described in **1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (NKJV)** “¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit *who is* in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? ²⁰ For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.”

The greatest example of total surrender is the Lord Jesus Christ during His time here on earth. Listen to the words that He spoke to the Father when he walked on the earth as God in a human body. He said in **John 5:19 (NKJV)** “Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself...” **John 5:30 (NKJV)** “I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.” **John 6:38 (NKJV)** “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.” **John 8:28 (NKJV)** “Then Jesus

said to them, ‘When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am *He*, and *that* I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things.’” **John 8:50 (NKJV)** “And I do not seek My *own* glory”. That is what denying self looks like.

Let me make these concepts personal by showing you a human being just like us who struggled with sin, self centeredness and human wants and desires, but who surrendered all. John Bunyan (1628-1688) was a Baptist Puritan Pastor. Bunyan was arrested for preaching without receiving permission from the Established Church, and was thrown in the Bedford jail where he remained for 12 ½ years. It was in that jail that he wrote the Christian classic *Pilgrim’s Progress* (second only to the Bible as the most printed book in history). When Bunyan was told to quit preaching, he said, “I cannot quit preaching because God has called me to preach.” He was warned that if he continued, he would be put in prison. He said, “If I go to prison, who cares for my family? But how can I close my mouth when God has called me to preach?” So Bunyan committed his family to the care of the Lord, and was obedient to the call of God. He preached and they put him in prison. Even though over 3 ½ centuries later we see how God worked through this painful situation to give us the tremendous Christian classic, *Pilgrim’s Progress* which was written in that jail, the self denial required by John Bunyan was costly. Listen to his own words. “The parting with my wife and poor children hath often been to me in this place, as the pulling [of] the flesh from my bones; and that not only because I am somewhat fond of these great mercies, but also because I should have often brought to mind the many hardships, miseries, and wants that my poor family was like to meet with should I be taken from them, especially my poor blind child, who lay nearer my heart than all I had besides. Oh the thought of the hardship I thought my blind one might go under, would break up my heart to pieces... But yet, recalling myself, thought I, I must venture you all with God, though it goeth to the quick to leave you; Oh I saw in this condition, I was a man who was pulling down his house upon the head of his wife and children; yet thought I, I must do it, I must do it.” [Quotes taken from John MacArthur, *The Hallmarks of Discipleship*, page 40-41].

When Jesus said in **Mark 8:34 (NKJV)** “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me”, that denying self may mean putting ourselves in an uncomfortable position or it may mean going to prison for 12 ½ years and leaving your family without a provider and a little blind girl without the father she loved so much. Yet, it is impossible to follow Jesus without denying self.

II. The Means of Denying Self

A self filled, self focused, self dominated, self empowered life is the essence of pride. Therefore, to deny self involves dying to pride and embracing humility (the opposite of pride). We would not be changing the meaning of what Jesus said in **Mark 8:34 (NKJV)** if we said, “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him *humble* himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.” I am convinced that humility is one of the most misunderstood traits in the Bible. In my opinion, the best book ever written on humility was a small book entitled *Humility: The Beauty of Holiness* by Andrew Murray (75 pages). Murray says this about humility: “It is not something which we bring to God, or He bestows; it is simply *the sense of entire nothingness, which comes when we see how truly God is all, and in which we make way for Him to be all.*” [Murray, page 13]. Murray is saying that humility is when we put self in its proper place and God in His proper place. When self will is broken and God is enthroned, that is humility. When self is reckoned or counted dead (crucified with Christ) and we are alive to Christ as absolute Lord, that is humility. **Romans 6:11 (NKJV)** “Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Humility before God manifests itself in the attitude of John the Baptist, “He must increase and I must decrease” (John 3:30). As we live in absolute surrender to and in total dependence on God we experience His mighty hand working through us making us a display case for His glory. In humility, we become the recipient of His supernatural enabling grace. Hudson Taylor caught the essence of what it means to be clothed in humility toward God when He said, “God uses [people] who are weak and feeble enough to lean on Him.” We cannot follow Jesus in our own strength. Our abominable pride would try to steal His glory! When we deny self, humble self we then are ready to take up our cross and follow Him.

Humility is so liberating. When we have not denied self, reckoned ourselves dead to pride, we are not capable of following Christ. Our focus is on self compared to others. Proud self seeks to bolster itself by constant comparison with others. For a self focused person, pleasure does not come in having something. It comes in having something more or better than someone else. Pride always has a self focus; it is always involved in comparison. Pride always has something to prove. A little book I have started a tradition of reading every New Years day has a message in the title. It is *The Freedom of Self Forgetfulness* by Tim Keller. That's what humility is! That's what denying self is! It is self forgetfulness! Denying self, reckoning self dead, humility, and total surrender is when I stop connecting and comparing everything I experience to myself.

Let me state something very clearly. To humble ourselves is not a work of the flesh. We must have God's enabling grace to deny self. Self doesn't want to die. Total surrender is not a little flippant shrug of your shoulders saying, "Why not give it a shot?" I must make the choice to make a total surrender to God and to reckon self dead to sin and alive to God. This denying self is constant. It is not a "one and done". Paul said in **1 Corinthians 15:31b (NKJV)** "...I die daily." Perhaps God is calling you to die tonight.

Allow me to close by sharing some very practical things we can practice that will enable us to follow Jesus without competition from the self life.

A. Meditate on and Praise the Worthiness of Christ

F. B. Meyer said, "The only hope of decreasing self is an increasing Christ". As we praise Him and savor His glory, we see how little we are and how He must be our all in all. Listen to music that exalts Him; read books that exalt Him.

B. Begin Each Day Acknowledging Your Total Inability and His Ability

Begin the day acknowledging your total lack of power in the flesh to walk in victory over _____ (fill in the blank). Appropriate the fullness of the Holy Spirit to fill you with the power to obey God and live out Christ's resurrection life through you. Claim Romans 6:11 substituting your stronghold for the word "sin". **Romans 6:11 (NKJV)** "Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to *sin*, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord." [sub alcohol, lust, discontent, greed, worry, anger, a negative critical spirit, bitterness, etc.]

C. Ask the Holy Spirit to Search your Life for Pride

Pride is so sneaky! It can hide from us and rob us of the enabling grace of God. Look for sneaky things like:

- * Seeing others sins as worse than yours
- * Anger when your goals are blocked
- * A spirit of competition in wanting to do and be better than others
- * An aversion to admitting you are wrong
- * Insensitivity to others
- * Worry which is a manifestation of pride
- * Self pity – Both boasting and self pity are manifestations of pride. Boasting is the response of pride to success, and self pity is the response of pride to suffering. Boasting says, "I deserve admiration because I have accomplished so much." Self pity says "I deserve admiration because I have sacrificed so much." Both are manifestations of pride.

CONCLUSION

The victorious Christian life is simply our approach to life that says constantly, "Not I, but Christ". We will never take up our cross and follow Jesus until we deny self. Roy Hession in his classic little book, *The Calvary Road* said it well:

*Lord, bend that proud and stiffnecked I,
Help me to bow the head and die;
Beholding Him on Calvary,
Who bowed His head for me.*