

18. Follow Me

“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.” Matthew 16:24.

“Jesus now explained to His disciples that His own life of self-abnegation was an example of what theirs should be. Calling about Him, with the disciples, the people who had been lingering near, He said, ‘If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.’ The cross was associated with the power of Rome. It was the instrument of the most cruel and humiliating form of death. The lowest criminals were required to bear the cross to the place of execution; and often as it was about to be laid upon their shoulders, they resisted with desperate violence, until they were overpowered, and the instrument of torture was bound upon them. But Jesus bade His followers take up the cross and bear it after Him. To the disciples His words, though dimly comprehended, pointed to their submission to the most bitter humiliation—submission even unto death for the sake of Christ. No more complete self-surrender could the Saviour’s words have pictured.”¹

You will notice that Luke adds another dimension with the word “daily.” Webster defines abnegation as “surrender” or “relinquish.” When we realize this surrender is even unto death, it takes on a very significant meaning, especially when coupled with the word “daily.” It sounds strangely familiar, for it was Paul who said, “I die daily.” 1 Corinthians 15:31, and again, “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 always 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.” 2 Corinthians 4:10-12.

Obviously, there is only one way to reflect the image of Jesus and that is not by trying but by dying. Since this is made so clear in the Scriptures, Satan has fought this principle with all his power. He has focused our attention on Christ’s words and emphasized the word “deny.” However, he has made us think that denying self is the same as self-denial. By the simple act of reversing the order of the two words, the meaning is completely changed in the human mind.

To practice self-denial can be a real beneficial experience in the character building process. This must never be equated with denying self, which is the process of crucifying self and keeping self crucified. When Christ is enthroned in the heart, self is dethroned; and when self is enthroned, Christ is dethroned. Every decision we make must be made by using the same formula that Christ used, “Not my will but Thine.” The Saviour followed this practice so completely that He said, “. . . the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.” John 14:10.

It is this secret that Paul learned and passed on to Timothy as the foundation of our life with Christ here and now. He said, “It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with Him, we shall also live with Him.” 2 Timothy 2:11.

Jesus not only said that we must deny self, but also take up our cross. It is an amazing fact that Christ uses the cross as the agent to bind the believer to Himself.

“The yoke and the cross are symbols representing the same thing,—“*the giving up of the will to God*. Wearing the yoke united finite man in a companionship with the dearly beloved Son of God. Lifting the cross cuts away self from the soul, and places man where he learns how to bear Christ’s burdens. *We cannot*

follow Christ without wearing His yoke, without lifting the cross and bearing it after Him.”²

“*We cannot retain self and yet enter the kingdom of God.* If we ever attain unto holiness, it will be through the renunciation of self and the reception of the mind of Christ.”³

“The reason many in this age of the world make no greater advancement in the divine life is because they interpret the will of God to be just what they will to do. While following their own desires, they flatter themselves that they are conforming to God’s will. These have no conflicts with self. There are others who for a time are successful in the struggle against their selfish desire for pleasure and ease. They are sincere and earnest, but grow weary of protracted effort, of daily death, of ceaseless turmoil. Indolence seems inviting, death to self repulsive; and they close their drowsy eyes, and fall under the power of temptation instead of resisting it.”⁴

Christ’s emphatic statement, “follow Me,” is utterly impossible unless we experience that which goes before in the same verse. He was not urging His disciples and followers to do what He did but to *live* as He lived.

The Father did, through Christ, that which He sent Him into the world to do. This was made possible by Christ choosing, every moment of His life, to be as the clay in His Father’s hands. In His sphere this surrender brought the only hope of peace to a universe that had been thrown into confusion by the rebellion of Lucifer who became Satan. In our sphere this surrender brings the only hope of our personal salvation. It is our privilege to live a life here which He can use as a magnetic force to persuade men and women of *God’s plan of salvation*. This plan is, indeed, the only process

conceivable that can prepare human beings to live eternally in the perfect environment of the home of the saved.

“Implicit belief in Christ’s word is true humility, true self-surrender.”⁵ “Self-surrender is the substance of the teachings of Christ.”⁶ It is only as we see the importance of trusting Christ perfectly, even though all things seem impossible, that we can grasp the urgency of Christ’s words to Nicodemus, “Ye must be born again.”

We had no choice in our first birth, but the new birth depends entirely upon our exercising the free will that can only be kept free by our choosing to die to self and letting Christ reign within.

Matthew closes his gospel by quoting the words of Jesus, “. . . All power (authority, *exousia*) is given unto me in heaven and in earth.” Matthew 28:18. This was the Father’s response to His Son for a life of total surrender while here on earth as He lived in the human flesh that He had assumed.

Christ was offered short cut routes. In the wilderness, at the very beginning of His public ministry, Satan tried to bargain with Him. After showing Him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, Satan said, “. . . All these things will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me.” Matthew 4:9. What a short cut! But by choosing to believe and trust God, even though it was by the way of the cross, and a willingness to die, He received from His Father *all power in heaven and in earth*. We must keep in mind that Christ made this choice in human flesh *with no power that is not available to each of us*.

“Jesus revealed no qualities, and exercised no powers, that men may not have through faith in Him. His perfect humanity is that which all His followers may possess, if they will be in subjection to God as He was.”⁷

Probably the most subtle short cut Satan offered to Jesus was at the beginning of the wilderness experience.

“He (Satan) tried to make Christ believe that God did not require Him to pass through self-denial and the sufferings He anticipated; that he had been sent from heaven to bear to Him the message that God only designed to prove His willingness to endure. Satan told Christ that He was only to set His feet in the bloodstained path, but not to travel it. He also stated that he was the angel that stayed the hand of Abraham as the knife was raised to slay Isaac, and he had now come to save His life; that it was not necessary for Him to endure the painful hunger and death from starvation; he would help Him bear a part of the work in the plan of salvation.”⁸

Satan has come to every child of Adam, since the beginning, with the same message, “Christ died for you so that you do not have to die.” It sounds so good because it is a partial truth. Christ did die to deliver us from the *wages of sin*, which is *eternal death*. However, He also lived a life of total self-abnegation (relinquishment) as an example of what ours must be. Satan will try to bring every kind of short cut to the struggling Christian, but the only route to the kingdom of God is following Jesus.

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Notes

- 1 The Desire of Ages p. 416-17.
- 2 The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 5, pp. 1090-91, The Review and Herald, October 23, 1900.
- 3 Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, p. 143.
- 4 The Acts of the Apostles, p. 565.
- 5 The Desire of Ages, p. 535.
- 6 The Desire of Ages, p. 523.
- 7 The Desire of Ages, p. 644.
- 8 Selected Messages, book 1, p. 273.