

DENY SELF *THE BATTLE OF THE WILL*

Dowlen Road, October 25, 2009 AM

Introduction:

- A. Luke 9:23-25.
 - 1. This text – which serves as our keynote text for our Fall Focus – lays down a very simple, but critical principle. If we want to be a follower of Jesus, there are some things we “must” do (v. 23a).
 - 2. Being a follower is not what I SAY it is. Only Jesus can tell me what I must do to come after Him.
- B. We must not allow ourselves to be sold a substitute; to settle for something less than authentic discipleship.
 - 1. I sometimes hear people say things like: “If being a Christian means I have to love my enemy or give up going to the lake on Sunday, then I’m not interested.”
 - 2. Sometimes churches even cater to this attitude. If you want to go the lake on Sunday, they will offer a worship service on Saturday.
 - 3. This attitude is fundamentally flawed because it assumes a right we do not have. We don’t define authentic discipleship. We don’t define our walk with Jesus. Only Jesus can do this. In the passage before us, Jesus says that authentic discipleship requires three things from us.
- C. This fall we have set our minds on being more devoted to Jesus.
 - 1. As we continue this study, this text will serve as our guide. We will examine the three things Jesus says we must do to truly be His disciple.
 - 2. This morning we begin where Jesus began – with the first great challenge the follower faces (v. 23, “he must deny Himself”).
 - 3. To make sure we thoroughly explore this requirement, we will examine it from three different angles.

The Meaning: *What exactly does Jesus require?*

- A. The language Jesus uses is powerful.
 - 1. He is literally saying that a man must disown himself. It is the same word used to describe Peter’s action when he denied the Lord (Matthew 26:72, “I do not know the man”).
 - 2. In this passage, Jesus says that we are to deny self. But what does that mean? His point is not that we should go live in a cave and deny ourselves any worldly comforts – a life of asceticism. In fact, it’s not necessarily giving up things that I like or want to do. Jesus’ point is bigger and encompasses more than this.
 - 3. Barclay put it this way: “To deny oneself means in every moment of life to say no to self and yes to God...once, finally and for all to dethrone self and enthrone God...to obliterate self as the dominant principle of life, and to make God the ruling principle...” (Barclay, pg. 151).
 - 4. To deny self means that, every day, in every situation, I say no to what I want so that I can say yes to what God wants. I renounce my feelings, plans, desires and purposes so that I can take up God’s.
- B. This is not an idea found only in this passage. It comes up again and again in scripture. Think about these passages:
 - 1. Romans 12:1-2. I am to present my life as a living sacrifice to God
 - 2. I Corinthians 6:18-20. You are not your own; you have been bought with a price.
 - 3. Galatians 2:20. Paul says he no longer lives, but Christ lives in him.
 - 4. Philippians 1:21. Paul’s life was so consumed with this principle that he could say that for him to live is Christ.
 - 5. Philippians 3:7-11. Paul counted all things in order to gain Christ.
- C. Keep in mind that no one compels us to do this. It is voluntary.
 - 1. I choose to set aside my will so that God can rule my life. We can’t have it both ways. It will either be my way or God’s way.
 - 2. But if I am to be His disciple, it has to be His way. Jesus said, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he MUST deny himself...”
- D. I suspect that some would consider = this demand and impulsively conclude that it doesn’t sound so difficult.
 - 1. It’s sort of like the single person who looks at marriage from the outside and concludes that being married isn’t so tough.
 - 2. Very often there is more to this business of self denial than we appreciate.
 - 3. So as we continue to examine this demand of authentic discipleship, we need to take a long hard look at the challenge involved.

The Challenge: *What’s so tough about self-denial?*

- A. It is interesting that Jesus begins here with self denial as He speaks to us about the challenges that face those who would be His disciples.
 - 1. There are so many other things He might have mentioned.
 - a. He might have mentioned our great adversary, Satan, and the need to resist him.
 - b. He might have mentioned enemies of the faith who would persecute those who follow Him.
 - c. He could have cited the vast array of temptations that would lure us away from God’s will.
 - 2. But He chooses instead to begin with this battle of the wills.
- B. It is perhaps the greatest struggle for those who would be disciples.
 - 1. It may not sound difficult, until we start trying to do it. Our challenge is not to deny self when God tells us what we want to do. Most of us don’t struggle with God’s instructions about murder. We don’t want to commit murder anyway. Nor do we struggle when God tells us things that we know we ought to do. It’s not always easy to make the time to teach and train our kids (Ephesians 6:4). But we know we ought to do this.
 - 2. Our struggle is to do what God says when it is not what I want to do – when our will is in conflict with His will.
 - a. Part of the problem is this culture of self-indulgence. Every day we have this philosophy pounded into our heads with all the popular slogans: “have it your way,” “you deserve it,” “you’ve earned it,” “you shouldn’t be deprived,” “no one should tell you what to do.”
 - b. But what happens when what I want conflicts with what Jesus demands?

3. Suddenly this business of self-denial isn't so easy. Now we have a battle of the wills.
 - a. I know Jesus does not want me to be angry and bitter (Ephesians 4:26-27), but that person did something terrible to me.
 - b. I know that Jesus told me not to leave my spouse (Matthew 19:9), but I have a right to be happy.
 - c. I know Jesus wants me to attend worship services (Hebrews 10:23-25), but I have great tickets to this ball game or concert and I don't want to miss it.
4. We start demanding our rights and insisting on having it our way.
 - a. What we forget is that we gave up having it our way when we decided to follow Jesus (Luke 9:23).
 - b. Our new objective is to please God in every way (Colossians 1:10). We don't have any rights.
 - c. We are slaves – slaves to righteousness (Romans 6:16-18).
 - 1) I don't have the right to hold a grudge. I'm enslaved to whatever God says about dealing with enemies.
 - 2) I don't have the right to leave my spouse, even if I think it will make me happy. I'm enslaved to God's laws that govern marriage.
 - 3) I don't have the right to skip out on worship and go to the ball game or concert because that's what I want to do.
- C. When I decided to follow Jesus I agreed to disown my will, my wants and my desires and to be ruled by God's will in everything.
 1. This is what Jesus is talking about when He says, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself..."
 2. We must not allow Satan to sell us on some discounted version of discipleship that says I can show up for a few services each week, then go about the rest of the time doing my own thing. Authentic discipleship requires that I disown self.
 3. It sounds like a lot to give up. Why would anyone choose to do it? This brings us to another angle from which we need to view this demand. We've emphasized the serious challenge this poses, but appreciate there is also an upside.

The Blessing: *How does this help me?*

- A. The most obvious benefit of self-denial is that I'm turning my life over to a loving Creator.
 1. God made me (Genesis 1:26). He's familiar with us and how we work. He knows better than anyone how we ought to live.
 2. He's also a loving God who seeks my good, never my harm (John 3:16).
 3. Denying self and letting Him be in charge is only going to make things dramatically better (Proverbs 3:5-8).
- B. But there is another benefit we receive when we truly decide to deny self and let God be in charge. This decision – more than any other – will uncomplicate our lives and make things easier.
 1. It is our waffling on this key issue that keeps us frustrated and miserable. We know what God wants, but we don't want to do it. So there is the battle of the wills. When I don't allow God to win, I feel guilty because I know I should. I suffer the consequences of my bad choices.
 2. By contrast, truly deciding that I will deny self and put God in charge gives me great clarity. In every situation, I already know what I'm going to do – whatever God wants me to do.
 - a. I'm not going to struggle over the financial gain I might get if I lie on my taxes. This decision is already made. Disciples don't lie (Colossians 3:9).
 - b. When there are problems in my marriage, I'm not going to wrestle with the decision of whether or not I should leave. This decision is already made. Disciples don't leave (Matthew 19:6).
 - c. I'm not going to struggle with whether or not I should go out drinking with my friends or cheat in the algebra exam. This decision is already made. Disciples don't get drunk (Ephesians 5:18), and they don't cheat (Colossians 3:9).
 3. I'm not saying that deciding to deny self eliminates all struggles, but it eliminates a lot of them. It's a pre-packaged decision. In every situation I know what I'm going to do. So, with all of these benefits we stand to gain, let's look at this challenge from one more angle – execution.

The Execution: *How do I do this?*

Putting the principle of self-denial to practice in my life will require five basic steps.

- A. First, it requires a decision. Do I really want this? Do I really want to be a disciple? Again, we cannot buy into discounted discipleship. It's self-denial or not at all. I've got to decide that I want this – I want to be an authentic disciple of Jesus.
- B. Second, I have to learn God's will. I can't do what I think God would want. This ultimately leads to people doing what THEY want. I have to study God's word and know what His will is for my life.
- C. Third, I have to trust that God's way is best. It's only when I TRULY believe that God's will is best that I will let go of my way and live life His way (Proverbs 3:5).
- D. Fourth, I must exercise self-control. I have to reign in all my passions and desires so that I can subject them to the will of Christ (II Peter 1:6).
- E. Fifth, I have to practice. I need to develop a daily habit of self-denial. A few years ago a friend suggested that I get in the habit of making myself do something I don't want to do (but that I ought to do) at least once a day: get up an hour earlier, say no to a snack you don't need, exercise, balance your checkbook. It's a great way to develop this habit of saying no to what I want and yes to what is right. It helps us discipline ourselves so that we will be able to say no to self and yes to God. It is a habit we must develop if we want to be authentic disciples of Jesus.

Conclusion: *Are you truly His disciple?*

Maybe you said you would serve Jesus, but have failed to deny self. It's time to be an authentic disciple. Or perhaps you have never made the decision to be a follower of Jesus. You need to make that choice today.