**BIBLE TALK Radio Broadcast**

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**Deny Self**

If anyone wants to be a disciple, a true follower of Christ, there are certain things he must do. Being a follower of Christ is not what I SAY it is, or what YOU might say it is. Only JESUS can tell us what we must do to be His disciple, His follower.

Jesus said in Luke 9:23, *“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.”* One of the requirements, if we are to be a true follower of Jesus Christ is we must deny self. Sometimes we 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.” And sometimes churches cater to those who have this attitude. If you want to go to the lake on Sunday, they will offer a worship service on Saturday. 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 we just read, Jesus says that authentic discipleship requires a denial of self.

What does this mean? What does it mean to deny self and follow Jesus? This is the focus of our lesson today.

The language Jesus uses here is powerful. He is literally saying that a man must disown himself if he is to be a true follower of Him. His point is not that we should go live in a cave and deny ourselves any worldly comforts. He is not saying that we should live a life of asceticism. In fact, it’s not necessarily giving up things just because I like them or want them. Denying self is giving things up in order to serve Jesus. It is saying no to self and yes to Jesus in all aspects of our lives. 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 Jesus wants. I renounce my feelings, plans, desires and purposes so that I can take up God’s.

This idea is not only found in this passage. It comes up again and again in scripture. Think about these passages: Romans 12:1-2 – *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”* In Galatians 2:20 Paul says, *“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.”* 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 – *“For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.”* Being a Christian mean we have dethroned self and enthroned Jesus.

Keep in mind that no one compels us to do this. It is voluntary. Jesus says, *“If anyone desires to come after Me…”* I choose to set aside my will so that Jesus can rule my life. We can’t have it both ways. It will either be my way or Jesus’ way. But if I am to be His disciple, it has to be His way. I must deny myself and follow Him.

Now, someone may consider this requirement of Jesus and impulsively conclude, “it doesn’t sound so difficult.” Very often though, there is more to this business of self-denial than we appreciate. We need to take a long hard look at the challenge involved in denying self.

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. That’s not that difficult. Nor do we struggle when God tells us to do things that we know we ought to do. It’s not always easy to pay our taxes each year, but we know we ought to do this. It may not always be easy to help a neighbor who is in need, but we know that is what we should do, and so we want to do it.

Our struggle comes when God commands us to do something and it is not what we want to do – when our will is in conflict with His will. Part of the problem is this culture of self-indulgence that we live in. 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.”

But what happens when what I want conflicts with what Jesus demands? Suddenly this business of self-denial is not so easy. Now we have a battle of the wills. I know Jesus wants me to love my enemy and do good to him (Matt. 5:44), but that person did something terrible to me. I know that Jesus has told me not to divorce my spouse (Matt. 19:9), but don’t I have a right to be happy? I know Jesus wants me to attend the worship periods of the church (Heb. 10:24-25), but I have great tickets to this ball game or concert and I don’t want to miss it. We start demanding our rights and insisting on having it our way.

What we forget is that we gave up having it our way when we decided to follow Jesus. Denying ourselves and following Jesus means our new objective is to please the Lord in every way. Paul’s prayer for the Colossians was *“that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.”* (Col. 1:10) You see, we don’t have any rights. We are slaves of Jesus Christ and He has full control of our lives. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 7:22, *“For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he who is called while free is Christ's slave.”* Paul said that he and Timothy were bondservants, or slaves of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:1). A slave is one who is owned by his master, and obeys his master. The master dictates what he does. Jesus is our Master. I don’t have the right to hold a grudge and ill will toward my enemy. I’m enslaved to whatever Jesus says about dealing with enemies. 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. I don’t have the right to skip out on worship periods of the church and go to the ball game or concert because that’s what I want to do.

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. This is what Jesus is talking about when He says, *“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.”*

Someone might be asking, “Why would I want to do this, deny self and follow Jesus?” For one reason it’s because He is your Creator and you are going to stand before Him one day in judgment. God *“has appointed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by the Man who He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.”* (Acts 17:31) Jesus is Lord, He has all authority and my eternal destiny is in His hands.

But another reason I need to deny self and follow Jesus is because of the blessings He will bestow. The most obvious benefit of self-denial and following Jesus is that I’m turning my life over to a loving Creator. God made me (Gen. 1:26). He is familiar with us and how we work. He knows us better than we know ourselves and He knows better than anyone how we ought to live. His commands are for out good. 1 Peter 3:10-12 says, *“For ‘He who would love life And see good days, Let him refrain his tongue from evil, And his lips from speaking deceit. Let him turn away from evil and do good; Let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the LORD is against those who do evil.’”* Loving life and seeing good days are for those who will turn it all over to the Lord and live life His way.

Another benefit that comes to those who deny self and follow Jesus is that this decision will make other decisions come easier. Denying self and putting 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. 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 of Christ don’t lie. When there are problems in my marriage, I’m not going to wrestle with the decision of whether or not I should divorce. This decision is already made. God does not what me to divorce. I’m not going to struggle with whether or not I should go out drinking with my friends or cheat on the algebra exam. This decision is already made. Disciples don’t get drunk (Ephesians 5:18), and they don’t cheat (Colossians 3:9). 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.

Another blessing that comes to those who deny self and follows Jesus is the promise of eternal life in heaven. Jesus said, *“Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come eternal life.*” (Luke 18:29-30)

So, with all of these benefits we stand to gain, let’s look at this challenge from one more angle – execution. How do I do this?

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

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.

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.

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.

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).

Fifth, I have to practice. I need to develop a daily habit of self-denial.

If you have not already begun to walk with Jesus, why not begin today? Deny self, take up your cross and follow Jesus.

Our time is gone for today. We thank you for listening.

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