Denying Self

(by David Maxson)

***“And calling the crowd to Him with His disciples, He said to them, ‘If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me’"*** (**Mark 8:34**).

My good friend, Keith Stonehart, gave me a powerful illustration for this verse. Let's say you are walking to Jesus and someone gets in front of you. He is in your face preventing you from going to Him. You politely ask this person to move but he refuses. You step to the left he steps to the left. You step to the right he does likewise. He won't let you pass. What do you do?

If you're serious about Jesus then what you do next is simple: **YOU DO WHATEVER IT TAKES TO GET HIM OUT OF YOUR WAY!** You push, shove, hit, fight... whatever it takes. No one is going to come between you and Jesus. *But here's the kicker*. *That person is you*. And yes, to remove self requires violence.

Denying self is not the same as self-denial. Self-denial is where you give up something you desire to get something else you want more. It is giving up sweets to lose weight. It is cutting back spending to save up for something you really want to buy. Denying self is more intense than self-denial. It involves self-denial but it is more than that. Denying self is where you say no to self. It is where you swap allegiance. Denying self is where you give up the fight, lay your weapons down, and surrender. Denying self is where you die.

That's why Jesus connects this idea of denying self to the cross. To Jesus, denying self and taking up the cross are one and the same. Denying self is essentially the death of self. Following Jesus is more than giving up a few pleasures or desires. We cannot just set self aside from time to time to follow Him. To follow Jesus, we must die. We must die to self. What is standing between you and your spiritual goals? There are numerous enemies out there that will oppose you, but Jesus says that the greatest enemy you'll ever face is you.

*“Lord, we relinquish all rights over our life and surrender our wills to You. Help us to make a complete crucifixion of self to follow You.”*

Just For Today

(Selected)

**Just for today** I will try to live through this day only and not tackle all the problems at once. I can do something for eight or ten hours that would depress me if I felt I had to keep it up for a lifetime.

**Just for today** I will be happy. Abraham Lincoln was right: *“Most folks are as happy as they make up their minds to be.”*

**Just for today** I will try to strengthen my mind. I will study. I will learn something useful. I will not be a mental loafer. I will read something that requires effort, thought, and concentration.

**Just for today** I will adjust myself to what is and not try to adjust everything to my own desires. I will take things as they come and not protest against them.

**Just for today** I will exercise my soul in three ways: I will do something nice for someone; I will do something I don’t want to do; I will keep my feelings under control.

**Just for today** I will have a quiet half hour all by myself. During this quiet time I will try to get a better perspective on my life.

**Just for today** I will set some goals. These will keep me from stumbling over two common problems: hurry and indecision.

**Just for today** ***“I will lift up my eyes to the hills -- from whence comes my help? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth”*** (**Psalm 121:1-2**).

All these things I will do – **just for today**. *(Also cf.* ***Matthew 6:34****)*

**A Worm in an Apple**

(Selected)

How does a worm get inside an apple? Perhaps you think the worm burrows in from the outside. No, scientists have discovered that the worm comes from the inside. But, how does he get in there? Simple. An insect lays an egg in the apple blossom. Sometime later the worm hatches in the heart of the apple, then eats his way out.

Sin, like the worm, begins in the heart and works out through the person’s thoughts, words, and actions. For this reason, David once wrote, ***“Create in me a clean heart, O God”*** (**Psalm 51:10**).

Think on this…

(Selected)

When we seek to win others to **Christ**, we must never think we possess any power in ourselves or lead others to believe we do through any air of superiority or lightness as we proclaim the gospel. We would do well to heed the advice of Dr. Payson, who said: *“Paint Jesus Christ upon your canvas, and then hold Him up to the people; but hold Him up so that not even your little finger can be seen.”*

*(Illustrations of Bible Truths, AMG International 1995, p. 13)*