

# Denying Self

by Albert N. Martin

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Will you turn, please, tonight to the 16th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. And I'll shall read verses 21 through 27. You'll remember now, our Lord Jesus has just received from Peter a statement concerning the fact that He was the Christ, the Son of the Living God. And He told Peter that flesh and blood had not revealed this truth unto him, but the Father who is in heaven. And having revealed His essential person (who He was), the very Christ, the Son of the Living God, we read in verse 21 that He begins to unfold the essential purpose for which He came. Having revealed who He is, He now begins to specifically reveal unto His disciples why He has come. He has given hints at it before. This concept that Jesus came to the Jewish nation and offered unto them an earthly kingdom, and because they rejected it, then He decided to die and become a Savior is utterly unfounded in Scripture. Jesus said, owning His ministry in John 2 with the first miracle performed in Cana of Galilee, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.... But He spake of the temple of His body." Our Lord Jesus came as the Lamb ordained from the foundation of the world. He came to die, but it was not until now that He began to unfold clearly and specifically and in detail the manner in which He would die. And so we have in verse 21 this clear statement. And I shall read now verses 21 through 27.

"From that time began Jesus to show unto his disciples, that He must [I want to underline that word] go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and the third day be raised up. And Peter took Him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from Thee, Lord: this shall never be unto Thee. But He turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind Me, Satan: thou art a stumbling-block unto Me: for thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men. Then said Jesus unto His disciples, If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whosoever would save his life shall lose it: and whosoever shall lose his life for My sake shall find it. For what shall a man be profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and forfeit his life? [It should not be translated 'soul.' It's the same word in the original as is used up in the preceding verse.] or what shall a man give in exchange for his life? For the Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and then shall He render unto every man according to his deeds."

In verse 21, we have announced to us that Jesus began to declare unto His disciples the imperative, the absolute necessity of His death. We read: "From that time began Jesus to show unto his disciples, that He must...." And it's a strong word. It's a word of intense imperative. He began to show unto them how that He must go to Jerusalem and that He must suffer and that He must be killed and that He must be raised again from the dead on the third day. Now I want to ask you a very simple question tonight. Why did Jesus speak of the imperative of His death? What made the death of this One who was just confessed to be the Christ, the Son of the Living God--what made His suffering and His death and His resurrection imperative?

You say, "Because God loved us, and in our sin He planned to provide a way of escape. And so Jesus had to go to the cross." Yes, I know that, but I wonder if you've ever penetrated beyond the mere shell of those words and laid hold of the real root cause of why Jesus had to go and die. Because of man's sin? Yes, but what is sin? What is the essence of sin? Until I understand what the heart and the essence of sin is, I will never understand the heart and the essence and the real throbbing goal of God in sending a deliverer from sin. If my conception of sin is just some bad things that I do that sort of make God frown, then I can never understand the core of purpose of God's redemptive work in which He plans to deliver men from sin. What is the core, the essence, what is the oiled down characteristic of sin? Andrew Murray, in one of his books, says this--and I'm quoting freely, not verbatim: "Sin consisted in nothing but this, but that man refused to have God as his all in all. And redemption has at its goal nothing less but that God shall become to His creatures all in all once again."

When Adam and Eve sinned, what was their sin? In essence their sin was this: they would not have God be everything to them. They would not have His will be the limit of their desire. They would not have His wisdom be the limit of their wisdom. They would seek a wisdom outside the wisdom that God knew was best for them. They would be like God, knowing good from evil. They would have a desire that fell out of the sphere of God's desire. He had said, "My desire for you is do not touch that tree. Do not eat of it, for in the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." And when they reached out and took of the forbidden fruit, they were casting off God as their all in all.

Sin has as its greatest cry that the creature has done what we read in Jeremiah 2: "For My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way." Do you get this? The root, the essence of sin is this rebellion in the human heart which refuses let God have His rightful place as all in all. But in the viciousness of our sinful nature and the rebellion of our hearts that God says are desperately wicked, deceitful above all things, the greatest wickedness of the human heart is that it has cast off God and hewn out broken cisterns that can hold no water.

Now we read in this passage Jesus says, "I must die, I must suffer, I must be raised again from the dead." Now what was His goal? Will you get a hold this? Why the imperative of the death of Christ? Why the necessity of His suffering and that terrible baptism of agony and blood and tears? Why the groans of Gethsemane and the piercing cry of Golgotha, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" What's the divine purpose in all of this? Here it is: Jesus said, "I am come that you might have life and have it more abundantly." What kind of life? The very life for which the creature was made, life in which God is all in all to the creature, life in which the creature wants nothing beyond the sphere of the will of God, life which the creature desires no wisdom but that which falls within the sphere of the wisdom of God, life in which the creature desires nothing more than the fellowship of his God. And anything that mars that fellowship, he wants it not no matter how delightful a morsel it might be.

Jesus died that we might have life. What life? The very life for which the creature was made, life in which God's person is the central focal point of our existence. Let me repeat that. This is not poetic language. What I'm saying is the core of the purpose of

that terrible scene that's recorded in detail in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, that scene which interpreted in the Epistles is called the message of the cross, which is the very heart of the Gospel. What is the goal of all of this? That you, my dear friend, might be brought to the place, by the grace of God, where God's person becomes the all-absorbing focal point of your existence, where you might say with the psalmist, "All my springs are in Thee. And any spring that is not in God is polluted, and I don't want it", and where God's will becomes the one consuming desire of your life.

Jesus died that He might have people to whom the will of God is precious, who can say with the psalmist, "I delight to do Thy will O my God. Yea, Thy law is within my heart." And when Jesus sealed the new covenant in His blood, one of the blessings of that new covenant was not merely a changed record in heaven. God says, "Their sins and iniquities I will remember no more." But He says, "I will write My law upon their hearts." Whenever there's a changed record in heaven, there's a changed heart on earth. And God inscribes His law upon the heart so that He has a people who delight to do His will.

Jesus came that He might purchase and enable a people to enter into this life where God's person is the central focal point, where God's will is the one consuming desire, where God's glory is the incentive, the motive of all that I do even down to what? "Whether therefore ye eat or drink, do all to the glory of God." Paul said that the purpose of redemption was to take the most common acts of eating and drinking and make them sacred by this motive: the glory of God. If that's to be true of eating and drinking, it goes without saying that this should be the only method, the only motive for which a man ever stands behind a pulpit. Dear preacher friends, don't ever make the pulpit a pedestal upon which to parade your flesh and your intellect and your abilities. Don't do it. It's wicked.

Jesus died that we might have life. What kind of life? A life in which God's person is all-absorbing, a life in which God's fellowship is our longing, a life in which God's will is our delight, a life in which God's glory is our motive that underlies all that we do and are, a life in which God's likeness is reflected in us. "For whom He foreknew, He also foreordained to be conformed to the image of His Son." Jesus said, "I must go and die." Why? "That I might have a people who reflect the very nature of My Father and of Myself." This is why He died. He died to purchase unto Himself a people to whom God Himself would be all-absorbing.

Now did He do this? Yes. He went to Gethsemane; He went to the cross, and He cried out upon that cross, "It is finished!" And in that death, what did He do? He satisfied the justice of a holy God that demanded that upon us should burn and break through all eternity eternal wrath. "Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them." God's curse was upon us. And as long as the curse of God was upon us, the wrath of God burned toward us.

And may I say this, dear people, you've heard the little shibboleth, "God loves the sinner but hates the sin." That's not true. God hates the sinner. My Bible says in Psalm 5, "Thou hateth all workers of iniquity." "He that believeth not, the wrath of God abideth on him [not his sin--him]." I cannot disassociate myself from my sin, neither does God. Who does God send to hell? To whom does God say, "Depart from Me"? Not to sin, some abstract thing, but to sinners, men who have been rebels against Him. How can God love with perfect love and hate with perfect hate? I do not

know, but it's not for me to know. Nor is it for me to adjust the Word of God to make it a little shibboleth that seems to answer the question.

Listen, you'll never know Holy Spirit conviction until you've seen yourself as an object of the pure wrath of a holy God, until you've taken the place of a condemned, guilty criminal. We're not to be pitied. We're to be blamed. Paul said after arraighing the whole human race before the bar of God in Romans 3, "that every mouth may be stopped and all the world may become guilty before God." It's a picture of the whole human race standing before the tribunal of God. And after the evidence of the law of God and the testimony of conscience and light rejected has been arraigned, everyone hangs his head as a guilty criminal and pleads guilty of the charge.

"Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them." And so as long as the curse of God was upon us, God could not have a basis (I speak reverently) upon which He could enter the life and begin to work out His purpose. Here's this creature that has turned from Him, that has turned to his own way, to his own lust, to his own desires, to his own wisdom, to his own will, to his own passion. God wants to take that creature and make it a creature who will live to the praise of His grace, who will live in fellowship to Him and to His glory. But sin stands as a barrier because "Thou art of purer eyes than to look upon iniquity", the prophet tells us. John tells us: "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." And so in the death of Jesus, God has satisfied His own wrath, for we read in Galatians 3: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us; for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree."

But now will you listen carefully. That cursing of Jesus Christ (you remember the secret of the cross) is found, not in what the Roman soldiers did and what the Pharisees did, but what God did. Isaiah 53 tells us: "The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." "He [God] hath made Him [Jesus] to be an offering for sin." "It pleased the Lord to bruise Him." Listen, when you look at the cross, see beyond the soldiers and the Pharisees and the scribes and even beyond the physical wounds until you see that here in the person of the Son of God, God the Father found His wrath binding its object in Him. So the Son of God said, "All of Thy ways and Thy billows are gone over Me. Thine arrows stick fast in Me." I'm quoting from the Psalms. "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me? Why art Thou so far from helping Me, and from the words of My groaning? Our fathers trusted in Thee: They trusted, and thou didst deliver them.... But I am a worm, and no man."

What's the meaning of all of this? God is telling you how He feels about your sin. For if ever God was to be lenient with sin, He would have been lenient with sin when that sin was being borne in the person of His Son. But He brought down wrath unmixed with mercy. "He hath made Him to be a curse for us, for it is written, Cursed is everyone who hangeth upon a tree." And now the justice of God has been satisfied. Jesus Christ has gone back to the right hand of the Father, and there He sits. And according to the hymn,

"By bleeding wounds, He bears received on Calvary.  
They pour effectual prayers; they strongly plead for me.  
Forgive him, O forgive, they cry,  
Nor let that ransomed sinner die.

This is familiar ground to many of us. I trust our hearts are warmed as we consider it again. But now will you listen carefully. Why did God satisfy His justice in the person of His Son? Why hast Thou dealt with sin? Why has He made Him to be sin who knew no sin to be sin for us? That we might become the righteousness of God in Him? Yes. That we might have a perfect standing in Christ. We read in 1 Corinthians that He is made to us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. But that was not an end in itself. God has given to every repentant believer who has been born of the Spirit of God a perfect standing in Christ. Why? That now He might begin to work in him by the Spirit the goal of that redemptive work, which is what? That God might now in the experience of the redeemed be all in all, that His will might be their absorbing desire, that His glory might be their incessant, constant, and burning motive, that His fellowship might be their greatest delight, that His service might be that for which they're willing to sacrifice and to toil and to deny themselves. God has given to those who are in Christ a perfect standing in heaven that He might by His Spirit begin to work in them and through them the very goal of His redemptive purpose that God might be all in all.

Don't you stop with a perfect record in heaven. If you're a child of God, God won't let you stop there. The Holy Spirit has come for what purpose? To make valid and real in the experience of the redeemed what Jesus died to purchase. And all that Jesus prays for at the right hand of the Father, that His own might be sanctified to the truth that they might be one, that ultimately they might be with Him and behold His glory. Get the beauty of this: what Jesus purchased with His blood and His death, what He prays for at the right hand of the Father, the Holy Spirit works in the hearts of the redeemed here on earth unto the praise of God. What a marvelous plan, what a marvelous working of our God so great salvation. God's purpose is that you and I might know what it is to have God all in all. And when redemption is complete, we read in 1 Corinthians 15 that even the Son in His place as Redeemer, in His place as the God-man who's worked out redemption--it says then even the Son shall be subject unto the Father that God might be all in all. And redemption's goal is finally obtained when God is all in all.

You say, "Brother Martin, you've gone a long way from the text, haven't you?" No, Jesus must die to bring this to pass. He must suffer, He must be killed, He must be raised from the dead. And now all is in readiness that God might work this out. But how is it going to be true of you? Let me be practical now. How can you come to the place, by the grace of God, where God's person is loved for what He is, served for what He is, where God's person becomes all-absorbing to you, where God's will becomes the most precious delight of your heart, where God's glory becomes the incentive and motive under girding all that you do, where likeness to God begins to be a vital experience, where fellowship with God is a constant reality? How can you enter into this kind of life that Jesus died to purchase? Verses 24 through 27 tell us. Having spoken of His death, Jesus then turns to His disciples and says, "If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whosoever would save his life shall lose it: and whosoever shall lose his life for My sake shall find it." These verses are vitally, organically tied in with verses 21 through 23.

Will you lay hold of this tonight? Will you asked God right now, "O Lord, open my eyes that I might behold wondrous things out of Thy law." Listen, Jesus said, "I must die, I must be killed, I must be raised from the dead. I must die if the creatures of God are to know the purpose of God in their lives. Now He turns to the creature and He

says, in essence, "You must die if you're to enter into the benefits of My death." Now get this. Listen to what He says. Let's look at the text. "If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."

What will that mean practically speaking? Verse 25 tells us. "For whosoever would save his life shall lose it: and whosoever shall lose his life for My sake shall find it." To deny myself, to take up my cross and follow Him in vital spiritual experience, practically speaking, means this: I will lose my life. Not my physical life--I'll explain what it is. Let's get a hold of the words and then we'll seek to get an understanding. Practically speaking, Jesus said, "If anyone will come after Me, deny himself, take up the cross and follow Me, it will be a losing of his life." Now when you lose your life, what's happened to you? You've died, right? Now Jesus said this: "If you save your life, you'll lose it. If you lose it, you'll keep it." How do I lose my life? By denying myself, taking up the cross, and following Him. Jesus said, "Just as surely as I have to die a literal, physical death and taste the wrath of the Father in order to purchase this life, you must die in vital, personal, spiritual experience (not physical death) if you're going to enter into the benefits of My death. That's what He's saying here That's His teaching boiled down in a nutshell.

You say, "I don't understand it." Well, I trust God will help us to see it as we move on. But get the principle--let's look at it now phrase by phrase. "If any man would come after me...." Now get this: everything that God purposes to do in redemption, He does through the person of His Son as applied by the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." God does not dispense any spiritual blessing apart from attachment to Jesus Christ. Now let me explain this. Failure to lay hold of this has produced untold confusion. Ephesians 1 says, "[God] hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." The Lord Jesus Christ is God's reservoir of spiritual blessing: forgiveness, reconciliation, adoption. All of these blessings are stored in Christ.

Now when do they become mine? I trust I'm not trying to be irreverent, but I want you to see this principle. God does not reach into the reservoir and take out a little bit of forgiveness and give it to a sinner. And then if he wants a little bit of holiness, reach in and take it out of the reservoir and give him a little bit of holiness. No, no. "[God] hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." Colossians 2 says, "Ye are complete in Him." Now listen, the only way God dispenses spiritual blessing is to unite a man to Jesus Christ in faith. And when he's united to Christ, then he becomes heir to everything Jesus purchased in His blood and everything the Holy Spirit wants to apply in his experience. Now that's not playing with words.

Let me belabor this just a minute. Here's a prince who goes from a kingdom where there's a very upright, moral, just king, a kingdom in which there is righteousness and peace, and there is full provision for all of his subjects. And this prince goes out to another kingdom in which there is nothing but poverty, squalor, filth, death, decadence, and need. And in this kingdom, he finds a young woman who captures his fancy. And he begins to unfold to this young woman the glories of his father's kingdom. He speaks of the tremendous amount of wealth in his father's kingdom and compares it to her poverty. He speaks of that in his father's kingdom by way of health and blessing that is in such contrast to the squalor and the filth. And so he unfolds to this young woman all that is in his father's kingdom. Then he says this: "If you'll give me your hand in marriage and you'll become mine, all that I fall heir to as son of the

king will be yours on one condition: that you give yourself to me." She says, "O, I would love to get out of this terrible mess and squalor and filth that I'm in. I sure would love some of the beautiful things (and she begins to talk about them) in that kingdom. The prince presses the issue: "Will you have me? Will you have me?" And if she says no to the prince. She'll have none of that to which he is the rightful heir. If she will not have him, she will not have his blessings.

Listen, the natural heart can long for forgiveness if all forgiveness means is getting fireproof from hell to get into a heaven which is sort of a glorified twentieth-century America without unions and with income tax and without burglars in the movie shows. But listen, God does not give forgiveness apart from His Son. God does not give peace apart from His Son. God does not give any spiritual blessing apart from His Son. And if you'll not have Him on His terms, you'll have none of the blessings of God. "If any man would come after Me," Jesus said, "after Me, after Me." You see this?

Now what are the conditions for coming after Him, coming after Him thereby entering in the very purpose for which He died and rose again and sits at the right hand of the Father? Jesus said, "If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." Jesus said the first requirement of losing your life in order to find it and entering into a life in which God Himself is central, His will is precious, His glory the driving motive, His fellowship the precious delight, this life that I've repeated again and again, trusting that somehow God will somehow filter it down through by the Spirit and begin to lay it into the beams and fibers of our hearts. How can I enter into this life? Only one way. I must lose my life.

What does that involve? It involves, number one, denying self. Now what is self? "If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself." What is self? What I am because of my roots in Adam and the rebellion of my own heart. It puts me at the center instead of God. That's what self is basically. 2 Corinthians 5:15: "And He died for all, that they that live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto Him who for their sakes died and rose again." Every man apart from the supernatural grace of God basically lives for one purpose. Whether he's a drunkard or whether he's a deceived religionist, whether she's a harlot or whether she sits and rocks in a reading chair and reads the Bible but has never known supernatural grace, everyone of us by nature has this in common: "they that live should no longer live unto themselves." By nature, you are the focal point of your own life, your will, your thoughts, your wisdom, your desires. What does Jesus come to do? He's come to replace that, not patch on something to it, not to merely change the direction of self from bad self to good self. He has come to replace the whole focal point and foundation of our living from self to God. That's what He came for.

Now how can I come to enter this? I've got to come to a place where I deny self. And the word "deny" is strong. It's the same word used of Peter when there in the court and a young woman came to him and said, "You must be one of them. Thy speech betrayest Thee." It said Peter cursed and denied saying, "I know not the man." What did he do? He pointed to Jesus Christ and says, "I bear no identification with Him. I have no allegiance to Him. I do not want to be identified or associated or considered as one of His. I disclaim all devotion and relationship, I disclaim all attachment, I deny Him, I repudiate Him." Now God says, "If any man would come after Me, [he must repudiate self]." He must come to the place from the bedrock of the heart and turning from this principle of loving myself, pleasing myself, glorifying myself, serving my own

will, serving my own end, accepting my own motives, and thinking my own thoughts. There must be a repudiation that is basic and bedrock and thorough, a denying of self. The mere lopping off of a few sins will not do. The mere turning away from a few manifestations of self and then replacing it with more subtle ones will not do. There must be a dealing with the root--denying self.

You say, "Brother Martin, on what basis can I? This thing is so vicious, so strong, so alive. How can I know that if I repudiate it, God will bring deliverance from it? Halleluiah, listen, this is the second aspect of the cross. For when Jesus died, not only did God judge my sin, but He judged me. The book of Romans, chapter 6 was written to unfold the blessed truth that when Jesus died, God judged not only this thing that we call sin ("His own self bare our sins in His own body upon the tree." "The Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all"), but Jesus Christ so identified Himself with His own, and they are identified with Him, that when He died, we died. So the book of Romans, chapter 6 opens up and says,

"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. We who died to sin, how shall we any longer live therein? Or are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with him through baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk [here and now] in newness of life."

Jesus died not to just give us newness of record, but newness of life. Get it? Not only newness of standing, but newness of experience. What is that newness? We read down, and God tells us by the Holy Spirit. Listen as I continue reading from Romans, chapter 6. "For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection; knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away [better translated 'that the body might be rendered inoperative or ineffective], that so we should no longer be in bondage to sin." My Bible says, "Knowing this, that our old man [not just our sins, but our old man, this natural self which has itself as its goal and object] was crucified with Him that the body [which is alive unto sin might be rendered in operative], that so we should no longer be in bondage to sin."

And what is the root of sin? Listen, it's this disposition to please myself in opposition to pleasing God, the disposition to honor myself instead of honoring Him, the disposition of gratifying myself instead of gratifying Him, the disposition to seek my own goals and aims and wisdom instead of His goals and aims and wisdom. And in the cross, this was judged, this was put to death. For what purpose? That henceforth I should no longer be its servant. 2 Corinthians 5 again: "And He died for all, that they that live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto Him who for their sakes died and rose again." This is why He died.

And there's deliverance from the power of self through the cross so I can come to the place where I with God can agree with Him about what He says about self. "Lord, Thou hast judged it and put it to death on the cross, and so I judge it and put it where Thou hast put it." This is verse 11: "Even so reckon ye also yourselves to be dead unto sin...." I don't go about and crucify myself. God has already done it. This is a historical fact. Now I must enter in vital experience and reckon it to be so and repudiate myself.

Now I want to be specific tonight. I don't want to deal with just theory. If you would know the purpose for which Jesus died, you must repudiate self, self as manifested in rival affections. In Luke 14, when Jesus saw a great multitude coming after Him, it says, "He turned, and said unto them, If any man cometh unto me, and hateth not his own father, and mother...[He named the closest human ties of affection, and then He went even deeper and said] and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple."

How different from modern evangelistic methods. When the multitudes began to press, Jesus knew that people are most liable to deception. There is a psychological pressure in masses. I sat a few years ago when I was in high school at an army football game in Yankee stadium in New York when I used to live near Connecticut (I don't remember exactly when it was now), and just seeing those cadets come out in that block of 14 square (whatever it was) and marching across there and sitting amidst thousands of people, there was an emotional stirring. It made me just want to do something. I didn't care what, just something. You know what I'm talking about. You get in a crowd of people, and there's something about the pressure of a mass movement. Jesus recognized that if there was to be deception, here was the place at which deception was most liable to enter the hearts of men. So what did He do? Encourage the deception by saying, "Thank you, thank you all for coming. You're all mine, and you're all in the kingdom"? No, He turned and said,

"Now wait a minute. You count the cost. Right now it's popular to follow Me, but in a little while I'm going to die. And I'm going to bring in My train of host of men and women who will be willing for My sake to seal their testimony in their blood. Listen, I'll not tolerate any rival affection. You come to me with a heart that is unwilling for Me to occupy a supreme place above father and mother and your own life also, you can't be My disciple. I will not tolerate rival affections."

Dear ones, human love can be a precious gift from God, but it can become a vicious idolatry. When the desire to please any creature goes beyond the desire to please the Creator, that person has become an idol. When the joy derived from the presence of any individual is deeper and more vital than the joy derived from the presence of God, that person has become an idol. When the desire to please any individual is more intense and more deep than the desire to please God, that person has become an idol. Listen, by nature, the human heart is full of idols. Jesus said you must repudiate self. Self--what aspect is this? The idolatry of human friendships must be repudiated. Jesus Christ must take the place of absolute sovereign and absolute and soul object of affection.

You say, "Boy, then it means I'm going to hate my wife." No, the man who knows Christ as the supreme object of affection is most tender and loving in the love of his wife, for he loves her with a pure love unmixed with selfish idolatry. And when he must exhort her concerning her own good because his love for his Lord is deeper than his love for his wife, then for her good, he loves her with a pure love that will exhort her lovingly and tenderly, will not overlook her faults. We're to love our wives as Christ loves the church. How? He nourishes and cherishes it. And part of His nourishing and cherishing is His chastising, "for whom the Lord loves He chastens." It's His comfort; it's His exhortation. Now you see, love that is not cleansed of self is spineless sentiment. It isn't love at all. And you'll never know how to love your wife (this is intensely practical) until you repudiate self (rival affection).

Secondly, any moral perverseness. We read in Colossians 3:5: "Put to death therefore your members which are upon the earth: fornication, uncleanness...." And then Paul goes on to say, "Put off anger, wrath, malice." And the verb used here is a decisive verb: "Put to death." Don't dilly dally with this thing. Don't go around and just pick at them and try to tolerate them and have a little peaceful coexistence with them. God says come to a place of brutal dealing. "Put to death therefore...." And how do I do this? By a repudiation of self, recognizing that these moral perversions, whether they be anger, wrath, malice, uncleanness of thought or desire, whatever they be. Those things were judged at the cross. And God says put them to death, knowing that our old man and all of its manifestations was crucified with Christ. All moral perverseness must be put to death. No man or woman will ever know the life in which God is all in all who tolerates any known sin. I did not say whoever experiences sin. I said whoever tolerates sin.

I do not believe that there is such a thing as sinless perfection, a state to be arrived in this life where it is no longer possible to sin and whereby temptation is no longer real. No, I don't believe any such a thing. I believe some folk who say they believe that, earnest, Godly people (and if there are any present, I'm not knocking you tonight. I love you), but you probably have a more limited definition of sin than what the Word of God has. If you mean by sin deliberate, overt, willful acts of rebellion, knowingly, deliberately, resolutely, premeditated, I believe with all of my heart God can bring us to a place where we do not deliberately, willfully, knowingly, premeditatedly persist in sin. In fact, if we do, we have good evidence to believe we are not His, for "Whosoever is born of God doth not [practice] sin [habitually, deliberately, willfully, premeditatedly]." But there is such a thing as having that heart attitude whereby the moment conscience has been made aware by the Word of God and by the Spirit of God that there's the presence of sin, and I do not tolerate it. The moment there is awareness, there is heart repentance and brokenness and confession and putting aside. "If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself." Self manifested in rival affections, moral perverseness.

Thirdly, self manifested in carnal ambition: me, mine, and ours. God says you must repudiate that. Come to the place where there's that desire for nothing but the will of God to be accomplished.

Fourthly, there must be a repudiation of self as manifested in perverse motives. Let's be done with this idea that we can use God and make Him a servant boy. Be done with this idea that God is our servant. And when we need something, we can clap the hand and God serves us. No, we were made for His service, not He for ours. I venture to say there are some of you tonight whose only concept of God is sort of a divine conductor and a train that goes to glory. If that's your only concept, dear friend, you're not on the way to glory.

Deny self. And how does self manifest itself? By making God its servant, asking God to bless me for my sake and for my reputation and for my name. No, no. Be done with all of that and come to the place where you know from the depths of your deeps of your being your only motive is that God might be glorified in you and through you. And you're committed to that purpose. And anything you ask of Him, you ask for that purpose. You've got no grounds for believing your prayers will be answered under any other conditions. Listen, "Whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, that will I do that the Father may be glorified." You can't just tack that on your prayer if that isn't woven into the warp and woof of your heart.

Unless you've repudiated self in the realm of these pernicious, evil motives of perverse desire to use God and make Him sort of your benefactor who blesses your family and helps your home--yes, God does all of these things, but He does them for those who come to the place where they long to be and to do all that they do for His praise. When they ask God to meet their needs, it is that He might be praised, When they ask God to touch the little child, it is that He might be praised. When they ask God to protect the family, it's not merely out of a carnal, animal fear of harm. The animal has this. The animal has no capacity to seek protection for the praise of his creator. He has no soul. God made us that in all that we ask of Him, the motive might be to His praise.

Some of you would have a real Gethsemane if you come to the place where you let God deal with your perverse motives. This perverse, selfish motive runs through the warp and woof of much of your experience. And if God begins to lay it bare to you, it isn't going to be pleasant. But this is the only condition upon which I can know how to enter into that right which He provided. Then there must be death.

There are other things I could mention. I want to mention one more: a repudiation of fleshly wisdom. What did Paul say? "The wisdom of God is foolishness with men, and the foolishness of God is wiser than men." Isaiah 55:8-9: "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith Jehovah. For as the heavens are higher than the earth [they are a whole different plane], so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." God's thoughts are not just more of ours. We have a little wisdom; God has much. Just like at the beginning of a triangle moving out this way, God's wisdom is a lot more than ours. No, no, God's wisdom is on a whole different plane. And God takes the foolish things to confound the things that are mighty.

Listen, we're cursed in the church today with the wisdom of man seeking to do the work of God, and it can't be done. The reason there's so many carnal methods and unscriptural and ungodly practices in the church of Christ today is because self in its own wisdom has not been repudiated.

Let me illustrate it. If you tell men that they are rebels against God; if you tell men God hates them with holy hatred in their sin; if you tell men they can never become the children of God until they repent and turn from sin and submit to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, you'd never get any converts. So what's happened? They have a positive approach to the Gospel. "The Bible says you're a sinner. Will you believe it? Now remember, you did some bad things as a child." "O yes, I remember that." "Alright, but don't get too upset. We want to comfort you. Jesus loves you." "That's wonderful. I did bad things and Jesus loves me." "Now all you've got to do is believe that Jesus died on the cross for you, and you'll be saved and go to heaven when you die." Then the line to that man once he's thought of heaven, I've said it before; I repeat it. It's a materialistic, heathen concept of heaven. Streets of gold, gates of pearl, no sickness, no unrest, no fear. He has no thoughts of heaven where God is all in all, and where there is righteousness and holiness and purity and worship. His only concept of heaven is a materialistic concept. And so that man is brought in, makes a profession, is called a child of God, and is incorporated into the work of the church on the basis of fleshly, uncrucified, carnal wisdom. And we're cursed with this. Some of you are the products of this. Beloved, I'm not being unkind. My heart bleeds.

What's God's way of saving souls? God's way is for His Word to be preached in its fullness, not just a few verses here and a few verses there wrenched out of context and formulated into a little formula and then presented again and again. Preaching the whole counsel of God is the job of His servants, and in the power of the Holy Spirit. And I've seen God bear witness to it when the terrors of God's holy law are held over the heads of men. And when men know that God hates them with holy hatred in their sin, they come trembling and cry out, "What must I do?" Then the Holy Spirit causes the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ to dawn upon the smitten soul, and they're wonderfully transformed by the grace of God, and they become new creations in Christ, attached not to the personal worker or the preacher but to the Living God. And they rise from thence to love Him and to serve Him and to pant after Him and to glorify Him.

"If any man come after Me, he must [repudiate fleshly wisdom in the matter of saving souls, fleshly wisdom in what's good for the church]." People say, "Well, if we get too strong, we'll offend people." Ah, listen, fleshly wisdom, fleshly wisdom--we must repudiate it. Now I want to ask you tonight, dear people, are you at the place where you're ready to repudiate self, self as it shows its ugly characteristics in tolerating rival affections, tolerating moral perverseness, carnal wisdom opposed to the wisdom of God, carnal ambition?

"If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself, and [secondly] take up his cross." This is a beautiful picture. Here Jesus has told His disciples, "I'm going out to die. And in my train, I'll bring with Me a host of men and women who are going out with Me." Living dead men (that's the picture), dead to their own ambitions and carnal wisdom and carnal desires, but alive unto their Lord who has captured their affections. "Take up his cross." Luke tells us: "Take it up daily and follow Me."

When Jesus announced His death, Peter moved in to say, "Lord, You can get Your purpose accomplished some other way." Get it now. Peter said, "Lord, be it far from Thee. Don't die. You can accomplish Your purpose some other way." Jesus said, "Get thee behind Me, Satan. There's no way to the accomplishment of the Father's purpose but through death." The minute you begin to set your heart to seek God and say,

"O God, I don't understand all that preacher talked about tonight, but I know this: I've never come to the place where I've seen the wretchedness of self, self-wisdom, self-desire, self-ambition. Lord, I want to see it. I know, in the light of what Your Word says, if I don't lose this lower life, I'll never gain the higher life. If I don't die to the lower life, I'll never enter into the higher life that Jesus purchased."

And the minute you begin to say, "There's no way but death, denying self," there will be a thousand Peters to rise up and say, "Be it not so, be it not so, be it not so." There will be the Peter of your own heart, your own flesh that will do anything but die. The flesh could be educated, cultured, Bible taught, but one thing the flesh will not do is die. But that's the one thing God says it's got to do. Culture the old man, dress him up, teach him Bible verses, teach him Bible stories, teach him to preach, teach him to pray, teach him to teach, teach him to do everything else, and he's blighting the church. And he's an old dead carcass of uncrucified flesh. God wants there to be the freshness of His own life. There's the Peter of modern evangelism that gets people in on no repentance. There's no structure, no undergirding foundation upon which they can be taught how to live unto God.

I speak to you young people. There's the terrible Peter of unspiritual advisers. Young people's work is cursed with this. They say, "O boy, look at that fellow, broad-shouldered football hero. Let's get him saved, and my what a witness he'll be." Fallacy! God will reach down and take a little hooked-nose, pimple-faced fellow that weighs a hundred pounds, get him so in love with Himself, get him so emptied of self that he doesn't want anything but Jesus. And God moves him into the school and he begins to open his mouth in the demonstration in the Spirit and power, and God works.

This whole idea to take a person who's popular and push him and set him up and make him an example--no, no, God says He takes the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty and to bring to naught the things that are that no flesh should glory in His presence. Unspiritual advisors--young people, listen, don't let anyone tell you God needs your talents. He doesn't need them. Don't let anyone tell you that you'd be a great boon and a great help in the kingdom of God. Your flesh is telling you that already. You don't need someone else to tell you that. God doesn't need you.

Does that make you uncomfortable? Does that stick a pin in the old balloon of pride? Hallelujah! I don't mean to be irreverent, dear ones. For somehow God could this truth through to us. Don't listen to the Peters who say, "You can enter into what Jesus provided in the cross any other way but through death." Death to self, death to self-interest, death to the rival of affections, death to the petty sins, death to the carnal lusts, death to the carnal ambitions, death, death, death! Only then will you know what it is to walk in newness of life.

Well, I trust we'll pray and ask God to make this truth clear to us. I don't know how well His servants can help so the Lord can get it through. But Jesus still says as He said back then, "If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whosoever would save his life...." Alright, you want to save that self life? You want to save it? Alright, you're going to spare that self life with its own wisdom and own abilities and own thoughts and own ends and its own glory and its own desires? You want to save it? You say, "No, no, I want to keep it." Jesus said, "Alright, you save your life; you'll lose it, the life that I purchased for you. But if you lose that life and consign it to death, then you'll find the higher life for which I died to make you experience."

And if you're tempted to just cast this off and say, "O well, so what if I don't?" Remember what Jesus said to close this passage? He said, "One day I'll come to reward every man according to His deeds." What you do with this truth is going to meet you in the day of judgment. Don't forget it. This is not optional. I dare not close without mentioning that verse. Jesus tied that verse at the end: "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and then shall He render unto every man according to His deeds." You spare this self life, you lose the life that Jesus provided. But if you're willing to consign this to death and look to Him who bled and died and rose again not only that your sins might be blotted out and that you might have a perfect standing in Him and have Him as your righteousness that He might become through His grace the object of your life and the goal of your existence; if you're willing to lose the lower life to gain this, one day you'll hear Him say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."