

*We aim to reconcile people unto God through Christ*

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| <b>SERMON TITLE:</b> | <b>BE LIKE CHRIST – IN HIS SELF DENIAL</b> |
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## **Like Christ: In His Self-Denial.**

Rom. 15:1–3, 7.

<sup>1</sup>We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. <sup>2</sup>Each of us should please his neighbour for his good, to build him up. <sup>3</sup>For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me."<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>4</sup>For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

<sup>5</sup>May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup>so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>7</sup>Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

Matt. 16:24.

"If any man will come *after me*, let him *deny himself*, and take up his cross, and *follow me*."—

Surely, he doesn't mean self-hatred. Just a few chapters after this lesson in the book of Matthew, somebody is going to ask Jesus what the greatest commandment is and Jesus is going to say that the greatest commandment is to love God with all your heart, soul and mind. Then he is going to say that the second greatest commandment that is just like that one is to love your neighbour as yourself. If we don't love ourselves, we cannot love our neighbours as ourselves.

As a matter of fact, if you are my neighbour and you hate yourself, I would rather not have you love me as you love yourself. Much of our spiritual journey is discovering who we really are beneath the surface of the person we have been taught to show the rest of the world so that we will be acceptable to other people. Much of our spiritual journey is to learn who we really are so that we can love our true selves.

Self-denial doesn't mean self-hatred.

Self-denial is often thought of as sacrifice. Are we all called to go in live in shacks because so many people around are. Are we all called to go hungry because many around us are? Is self denial an act of self starvation of any good thing in life? Is this what Jesus meant when he said deny yourself

One of my favourite verses in the Bible is John 10:10 where Jesus says: "I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly." Are these two statements contradicting one another?

Let me tell you as story a Sunday school teacher told her class many years ago

"There is a little girl who went to spend a weekend with her Methodist grandmother who was a very, very strict old-time Methodist. After church on Sunday, the little girl came home and went to turn on the T.V. Her grandmother came over, turned the T.V. off and said: "Methodists don't watch television on Sunday." So she got out some cards and began playing solitaire. Her grandmother came over and took the cards away and said: "Methodists don't play cards on Sunday." So she got out a comic book and started to read it and her grandmother came over and took the comic book away and said: "Methodists don't read comic books on Sunday." So she went

*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*

*John 3:16 NKJV*

outside and sat on the back steps of the house. The neighbour's pet wandered over, a basset hound, and sat down next to her. She turned and looked into the basset hound's droopy, big, sad eyes and said: "Oh, I see you're a Methodist, too!"

So Jesus says: "If any would be my followers, let them deny themselves..." Self-denial includes: denying yourself and take up your cross and follow me."

We do not deny ourselves for the sake of self-denial. We take up a cross that claims us and we follow Jesus. We take up a commitment for which we decide that we will live and die. We give ourselves to something. We give ourselves to Christ. And what we give ourselves to leads us to give up something else, but it doesn't feel like we've given up something. It feels as though we have finally found ourselves. We have found life and found it more abundant and not self-denial.

Parents with children understand that when a child arrives, life changes like it has never changed before; nothing is yours anymore, you give up your time, you give up your sleep, and often give up your bed. You may give up the dream of an overseas trip or a new car or whatever you set your heart on because you have to feed and school and train this child. Without warning you have been dumped into a self-denial routine for the next 20 something years. And yet it does not feel like self-denial. It feels like fulfilment.

That sense of a need to contribute some little baby who will develop into a man or woman of God, find a job and marry someone and have children of their own and repeat the self-denial cycle for generations to come brings tremendous fulfilment.

Doing something to make the world a better place should grab us, doing something to change someone's destiny should excite us, You pick up that cross and you have denied yourself something, but it really feels like you have found something to give yourself to.

We deny ourselves and devote ourselves to these things. But we also find ourselves.

I think this is what Jesus means, when he says that those who want to save their lives will lose it. But those who lose their lives for the sake of Jesus, for the sake of God, will find life. For what will it profit us if we gain the whole world but lose love, truth, justice and beauty?

We do not deny ourselves for the sake of self-denial. We take up the cross, and we follow Jesus, and we lose ourselves and so find ourselves.

*Even Christ pleased not Himself:* Christ pleased not Himself when it came to His walk with God and man. These words *Even Christ pleased not Himself* is the key of His life. In this, too, His life is our rule and example; we, who are strong, ought not to please ourselves.

To deny self—this is the opposite of pleasing self. We are called to follow Christ's example and deny ourselves, lose ourselves so that we can find ourselves. We have got to cut ties with the old nature and its selfish desires and commit ourselves to live for Christ and the well-being of our fellow man. Assist someone to achieve their dreams. Minister to your neighbour and show them Christ is real.

We got to get up in the morning and say I will take no notice of the old nature. The old Adam is dead. Through the cross of Christ I am crucified to the world, and the flesh, and self: to the friendship and interest of this old man I am a stranger; I deny him to be my friend; I deny his every claim and wish; I know him not.

The Christian who only thinks of his salvation from curse and condemnation cannot understand this; he finds it impossible to deny self. The Christian who has taken Christ as his pattern cannot be content with the world and its selfish systems. He has surrendered himself to seek the most complete fellowship with the cross of Christ. This is a place of self-denial and self-sacrifice. The Holy Spirit has taught him to say, I have been crucified with Christ, and so am dead to sin and self. In fellowship with Christ he sees the old man crucified, and he sees a new person rising to please his Saviour. *Because the crucified Christ is his life, self-denial is the law of his life.*

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This self-denial has not so much to do with what is sinful, and unlawful, and contrary to the laws of God, as with what is lawful, or apparently indifferent. To the self-denying spirit the will and glory of God and the salvation of man are always more than our own interests or pleasure.

Before we can know how to please our neighbour, self-denial must first take root in our own personal life. Is it not true that if self denial is an issue that our hearts may be divided. When Christ's image touches our lives and when we yield ourselves totally to him unreservedly, it is then when we hardly dare any longer speak of self-denial, because we find what we thought we would lose we have gained much more. There is no greater blessedness than becoming conformed to the image of Jesus.

I don't think that self denial necessarily causes pain because if it does it could mean that we are reluctantly giving ourselves to Christ.

What a glorious life will it be in the Church of Christ when this principal is grasped, when each one considers it the object of existence to make others happy. When each one of us denies himself, seeks not his own, esteems others better than himself. All thoughts of taking offence, of wounded pride, of being slighted or passed by, would pass away.

As a follower of Christ, each would seek to bear the weak and to please his neighbour. The true self-denial would be seen in this, that no one would think of himself, but live in and for others.

"If any man will *come after* me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and *follow* me."

Christ's call is COME FOLLOW ME."