

## FOLLOWING JESUS

After Peter identified Jesus as the Christ (Mark 8:29) and Jesus told His disciples of His impending suffering, death, and resurrection (Mark 8:31), Jesus spoke to the people about the nature of true commitment to Him. He states that if anyone desires to come after Him, he/she must be willing to do three things (Mark 8:34):

*“Let him **deny himself.**”* If one is truly to come after Jesus, the process begins with self-denial. One cannot be filled with Jesus if he is filled with self. One cannot follow God’s will if his own will takes priority. The self-denial of which the Bible speaks is not the random giving up of something we like for a short time as a show of religious piety. True biblical denial of self means the denial of our worldly desires. The denial of self means the denial of our will in favor of God’s will. The denial of self means the denial of the sin which separates us from God.

Let him *“**take up his cross.**”* The cross was the place of suffering and death for Jesus, a death He willingly suffered on our behalf. When one gives himself to Christ, there may be suffering that will accompany that decision, however there most certainly must be a death to self. Because Jesus made Himself the sacrifice for our sin, Paul asserted the rational response would be to *“present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service”* (Rom. 12:1). He tells us how this understanding affects his life: *“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me...”* (Gal. 2:20). Taking up one’s cross represents dying to self.

Let him *“**follow Me.**”* Of course, the emptying that comes with self-denial and dying to self as represented by taking up one’s cross is of no value if it is not followed by a filling with the things of God. In fact, the singular purpose of dying to self is to allow Christ to live in oneself. This is accomplished when one follows Jesus through obedience to His commands, submitting to His will, and taking on His character.

The upshot of Jesus’ teaching on following Him is that it is not a casual, part-time, half-hearted commitment. It is a radical change that is likened to death followed by a new life in Christ (Rom. 6:4; Col 3:3). Paradoxically, it is only through that death to self that one can ultimately save his/her life for eternity. *“For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it”* (Mark 8:35).

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