

Murder Self and Live for God, Part 1

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If you have your Bibles you can turn to Luke 9, where we're continuing on from last week. This morning's text was going to be Luke 9:23–27, but we're just going to do verse 23. Jesus is going to teach us that we need to murder self and live for God.

R. Kent Hughes, commenting on James Hunter's book *Evangelicalism and the Coming Generation*, rightly points out that:

Self-focus is part of the modern evangelical identity! This is why increasing numbers of evangelical Christians care little about the glory of God or reaching out to the lost world. For them Christianity exists to enhance their lives, their marriages, their bank accounts, their prestige. But to bear a cross, to pay a price for standing for Christ—no thanks.¹

Al Mohler, in the foreword to Steve Lawson's book *Made in Our Image*, said:

The god of the American popular culture is an indulgent heavenly spirit who is little threat to our lifestyles and luxuries—

¹Hughes, R. Kent. *Luke: That You May Know the Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossways Books, 1998), p. 342.

a God consistent with consumer culture and rampant immorality. This god might wish that human beings would behave, but he is powerless when they do not. A vast majority of Americans claim to believe in God, but most believe in an idol of their own imaginations. This deity is always there to be called upon in times of trouble, but he would never intrude upon our personal space, judge our sins, or hinder our happiness.²

Lawson himself says in [his] book:

Sad to say, we are suffering from a low view of God—an impoverished vision of Him as a god with manlike characteristics. A user-friendly God made in our image, an inversion of the truth of man made in His image. Human qualities and finite limitations have been assigned to the One who exceeds our comprehension. Rather than seeing Him as He is—above and beyond us, infinite in His divine perfections—he is portrayed as a glorified us. The result is a god who makes us feel comfortable—one we can control and manage, even use. This downsized version of God is a diminutive deity dependent upon us; we are not dependent upon Him. Forged upon the anvil of a sloppy handling of Scriptures and shallow thoughts about God, this user-friendly sovereign is a strange kind of co-dependent god, and we see the effects of his influence all around us. Many churches have become nothing more than entertainment centers, giving slick performances to growing numbers of mesmerized but unproductive churchgoers.³

It is this selfish approach to God, and Christ, and the Church, and the Word of God [that] has led to an entire generation of religious hedonists

²Lawson, Steve. *Made in Our Image: The Fallacy of the User-Friendly God* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2006), p. 12.

³*Ibid.*, p. 15.

who think church is a place they come to be served, to be pampered, to have their lusts fulfilled, their style of music played, and their programs offered in just the way they want. Church to them is a spiritual shopping mall where they wander about rejecting most items but picking and choosing a few which will satisfy their lusts.

If the preacher causes them to be aware of their sin or, God forbid, to feel guilty, that preacher is at once labeled a legalist. If the preacher warns of hell, threatens of judgment, speaks of the wrath of God to come, and the eternal punishment of sinners in hell, that preacher, he's unloving, he's unkind, he's harsh, he's condemning, and he's mean-spirited. If the worship leader doesn't play songs which appeal to people's sensual lusts and they don't have a beat which kind of moves them and is repetitious and driving, the worship leader is a dinosaur, he's out of touch, he's incompetent. They could care less what the words say as long as they feel good when they sing.

But the worst thing about today's religious hedonism is [that] it causes those who are ensnared by it to despise obedience to Christ. Preach to them about the necessity of obeying Christ, of following Christ, of submitting to the Word of God, of pursuing holiness, [and] they are confident [that] you are preaching works salvation. In their minds, the grace of God is a license to sin [with] impunity. Grace will cover it—it is an irrevocable ticket to heaven and it matters not how they live. Press them to obey, press them to submit to the Word of God and you're a Pharisee, you're a dangerous heretic to be avoided at all costs. Their God is a God of love, of grace, and mercy only, and they receive the love, and they receive the grace, and they receive the mercy because it's all about them and what God can do for them. God to them is a heavenly vending machine that they use to get what they want.

Religious hedonism is self-indulgence powdered with a fine coating of Christian jargon. It's about God making you happy and God worshipping you. Present-day religious hedonism begs for an important question to be asked, and it is this: What do works and obeying Christ have to do with Christianity? The question might be asked in two different ways. You could

ask it this way: First, what works must you do in order to earn salvation? Well, hopefully this question causes all sorts of sirens and alarms to go off in your head because the answer is “none.” You can do nothing to earn your salvation. It is a free gift of God’s grace, which is unearned, undeserved, unmerited favor. Secondly, we might ask it this way: What works must you do as a necessary consequence of salvation? It is the answer to *this* question that religious hedonists have wrong because they answer in the same way: “None.” They deny that salvation changes a person’s life.

But the Word of God teaches, as we shall see this morning, that those who are truly saved are given God’s grace, [are] transformed by that grace, understand what God wants them to understand, and they begin on a path of obedience and perpetual growth in holiness. [They do this] not as the earning of salvation, not so they can merit salvation, not because they have to do this so God will like them and save them, but as the necessary consequence [resulting from] God’s saving grace working in their lives.

The Bible says that when someone is saved, God regenerates them so they become “new creatures in Christ; old things pass away and all things become new” [see 2 Corinthians 5:17]. If you think you are saved and yet are still the same old creature, believe me, you’re not saved. Again, it’s not that Christ’s followers must follow and obey Him in order to *cause* their salvation or *earn* their salvation. People are saved by grace through faith alone in the person and work of Jesus Christ [see Ephesians 2:8]. But, after [they] become saved, the grace of God changes [people] because the Holy Spirit of God is indwelling in them, and “He who begins a good work in them will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus” [see Philippians 1:6]. “[Those] whom He called He glorified, whom He chose He justified” [see Romans 8:30]. God is the one who calls, and justifies, and sanctifies, and glorifies. He does it necessarily and He loses none.

A pattern of obedience to Christ and growth in holiness is not the exceptional behavior of an extra few fanatical, godly Christians. It is normal, necessary, average Christian behavior. You walk into a room and it’s dark, so you flip on the light switch. Now, is the light on if the light doesn’t come

on? No. The switch is broken, the wiring's broken, the breaker is flipped, or the lightbulb is burned out. No light [means the] light's not on. In the same way, is someone saved who doesn't follow Christ? No, the light's not on.

I tell you these things because from here on out in Luke's gospel, we are going to be learning about *real* Christianity, and it is a Christianity [that] is quite unlike the Christianity you hear about in most books, most Christian magazines, and most churches. As I preach through the text today, I am confident that some of you are going to feel uncomfortable. Your first thought is going to be [to] wonder what's wrong with me. How could I teach these things? Well, just save your e-mails, save the ink in your pens and the lead in your pencils. Don't waste your time accusing me of teaching works salvation. I do not teach works salvation. I have never and will never because salvation is by grace. But I do teach, and will always teach, that salvation and the power of God in a person's life—His grace—necessarily changes [that person] into a follower of Christ.

It's my desire to see those of you who are not saved become saved. Nothing grieves me more than to know that there are people who hear me preach who can leave here and not be saved. For the rest of you who already know Christ, learn, grow, know what salvation is better, know how to share the gospel better, and know what real Christianity is better.

So, let's get to the Word. Luke 9. We've already looked at verses 18–22. In verse 18, Jesus is praying alone with His disciples. He realizes that difficult times are coming, and so He wants them to know this and He begins to teach them about His identity. He begins at square one, like the famous quote by Vince Lombardi to professional football players, "This is a football." Jesus starts out in the same way: "Who am I?" I mean, that's about as no-brainer as you can get. [The disciples] throw out some popular opinions that some say a prophet, John the Baptist, Elijah—they're giving Him some options.

But, finally, the truth comes out. Peter utters the correct answer, which was given to him by divine revelation: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God" [Matthew 16:16, KJV]. Then Jesus verifies [Peter's state-

ment] in front of His disciples. When I say disciples, don't just think of the Twelve, think of probably the whole group of men and women who have been following Him—maybe a couple hundred people. We don't know, but we've seen that when it says "disciples" it doesn't just always mean [the] Twelve unless it says "[the] Twelve." But, He says in front of these people, "I am the Christ, the Son of the Living God," by saying to them that what Peter just said [was] true.

Now, at this point, it's become definitively clear who Jesus is, and it's the most thrilling news that could ever be confirmed. But Jesus says, "Don't tell anybody" [see Luke 9:21], and He gives them the reason why: "Because I have to go to Jerusalem, I have to suffer, die at the hands of the leaders there, and then be raised up" [see 9:22] Jesus' whole point is, "Listen, if you run around now and tell everybody I'm the Messiah, there will be so many people who will be coming [to Me] that that won't occur, most likely, and so don't tell anybody—yet."

Now, it's not recorded in Luke's Gospel, but it's recorded in the parallel texts in Matthew 16:22 and Mark 8:32 that Peter, then, upon hearing that Jesus would die, pulled Jesus aside and rebuked Him . . . the Lord of Glory. "You surely will not die!" This then prompted Jesus to rebuke Peter and say, "Get behind me, Satan." Peter, in opposing the will of God, was acting like the adversary of God, Satan, so Jesus gave him that title to expose the folly of [Peter's] actions—that [Peter] was just merely concerned about *himself* and what *he* wanted for *Peter*. Luke leaves these details out, and instead, after recording Jesus' predicted death, then records for us that Jesus then told all of those who were present that guess what? "You're going to have to die, too." So, follow along as I read Luke 9:23–27. This is God's word to you:

And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who

will save it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. But I say to you truthfully, there are some of those standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.

So this text explains four necessary truths [that] every Christian must know and experience in order to get to heaven, to be saved. We're going to look at the first one, [which] is this: The death you must die. Look at verse 23: "And He was saying to them all." Just stop there for a minute. We know from the parallel text in Mark 8:34 that when it says "them all," he's not just talking about the Twelve, he's not just talking about the wider group of [Jesus'] disciples in general, he's talking about everyone because Mark says, "He summoned the crowd with His disciples."

William Hendriksen, in his commentary on Luke, says, "Jesus calls to Himself the multitude, for the earnest exhortation which follows is of significance to all; in fact, is for all a matter of life or death. Of everlasting life versus everlasting death." So, picture [this] in your mind: Jesus probably told Peter and the apostles, "Tell the crowd to give us some space." Jesus, then, goes off—He's probably still within eye shot of the crowd—and the crowd is kind of like a bunch of vultures. They're [wondering], "Are they done praying yet? Have they stopped yet?" They're there, but Jesus and the disciples are alone. The crowd is waiting to see a miracle, to get healed, to hear Jesus teach, whatever, and so they're waiting. Jesus, after speaking personally to His disciples—the group of disciples, men [and] women, not just the Twelve—then says, "OK, go and bring everybody in because now [I'm] going to do some universal address[ing]." And then, He launches in to what we just read.

So, Jesus now has this huge group of people in front of Him—His Twelve, His other disciples, and this multitude. Surely in the multitude there

are people who are interested in Jesus, interested in following Him, fascinated by what's going on—His miracles—wondering if this could be the Messiah. Surely there were some in the multitude who were on the brink of possibly following Jesus. Jesus knows this. Just as there are probably some here this morning who are interested in Christianity, who may be thinking, “You know, I might become a Christian. I might commit my life to Christ. I don't really know what it means, I don't really know what that involves, but I'm here and I'm listening, and so tell me.” So I am. I'm going to tell you what Jesus says it means to be a Christian.

[Luke 9:]23 continues. Look there—Jesus says, “If anyone wishes to come after Me.” Now, you have to stop [here because] these words are just loaded. See that little word “wishes” or “desires” there? You have to realize that this *never* happens apart from God's grace. Nobody ever wishes to follow Jesus apart from God's grace. So, right off the bat, when Jesus says, “If anyone wishes” or wills, “to come after Me,” He's implying by this that there are some that the Spirit of God is working in who are now being drawn to Christ. The verb is an active tense and it identifies those who are continually being drawn or desiring, or wishing, to come after Jesus.

Jesus, in John 6:44, speaking of the irresistible grace of God which draws sinners to repentance, said this, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.” “No one can come to Me unless the Father draws him.” If God draws you, you will be raised up in the resurrection to life in the last day. The word “draw” means to “draw or pull along.” It is used of fishermen who would throw out their nets and draw them in, bringing the fish with them. The reason anyone ever wishes or wills to follow Christ is [that] the Holy Spirit of God is moving in them to draw them to a place where they want to know and follow Jesus. It is the work of God. Coming to Jesus is not something that a natural man does on his own.

It amazes me to no end and [irks] me to degrees greater than I can express when I read things that are sent to me about being “seeker sensitive.” Jesus, after speaking to Nicodemus about the necessity of being born again

in order to enter the kingdom of God, says these words in John 3:19–20. This is the biblical estimation of men in general apart from the Holy Spirit drawing them to Christ.

This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.

Who is the Light, which when coming into the world enlightens every man? Jesus. What did Jesus just say? “*No one* comes to Me on their own. Ever.” When a person does not know Christ and does not have the Holy Spirit of God and God’s grace working in them to draw them to Christ, they don’t want to come. They’re repelled by the Light. They’re repelled by Jesus, who Himself is the “Light of the world” [John 8:12]. “Light” is a synonym for “truth,” and when truth is present, it shines in the light, error is exposed, and judgment is promised.

This is why [people react the way they do]—and I’m sure everybody who is a Christian has experienced this—when you’re at work, you’re having lunch with somebody, or talking to a neighbor, and you bring up something God says. They’re sharing their opinion on some political issue or some moral issue and you just happen to put out there, “Well, you know, the Bible says...” and all of a sudden [the person] kind of gets this stern look on his face. And, he instantly becomes defensive or he wants to change the subject, or he becomes angry, or condemns you as being self-righteous. You wonder in your heart, “Why is this? I mean, he was sharing his opinion, I shared God Almighty’s opinion and now he’s mad.” Well, the reason he’s mad is because when God’s opinion is shared, truth is shared. When truth is shared, sin is exposed. When sin is exposed, judgment is the necessary consequence, and he doesn’t want judgment. He doesn’t want to be reminded that judgment is coming. He doesn’t even think it exists. He would rather not discuss it.

In John 16:8–11, Jesus speaks of the coming of the Holy Spirit after His death and resurrection, and says: “And He,” speaking of the Holy Spirit,

“when He,” the Holy Spirit, “comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me; and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.”

You see, when you speak the truth to somebody, the Holy Spirit is working in that truth. That is why the Word of God is “living and active and sharper than any double-edged sword, and piercing, and judging”—[see Hebrews 4:12. And so, when you let out the truth, “Ah!” they get it, and they get defensive. “Ow! What you’re saying judges me. I don’t like it.” The children of Satan love their sin and love their master so much that they would follow him even though he desires to see them destroyed. You come along, speak the truth of God’s Word, and you’re pushing them toward their doom. They feel like they’re standing on the edge of an active volcano, on the rim of a volcano, and you’re behind them [poking them in the back and saying], “This is what God says.” They don’t like it.

Paul, explaining the sinful condition of every man and every man’s normal response apart from the grace of God, says this in Romans 3:10–12. Paul writes: “As it is written,” he’s quoting other texts in the Bible and assembling them together. “THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS,” listen to this, “THERE IS *none who seeks for God*; ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, *there is not even one*” [emphasis added]. Well, that puts a damper [on things] if you’re waiting for people to come seek Jesus. Jesus came to seek and save those who are lost [see Luke 19:10], not to be found by those who were seeking on their own.

God's grace, though, works in people's lives so that they want to seek Him. All of you who know Christ as your Savior have experienced this. There was a point in your life where all of a sudden religion seemed like the right thing. Maybe you got interested, and maybe there was a process, and you just started hungering and asking more questions, and getting more information, and finally you came to the Lord. Maybe it happened all of a sudden. Maybe you weren't seeking God and all of a sudden somebody came, shared with you, and there was this compelling urge to accept, believe, and follow Jesus. Whatever the spectrum, whatever the case, when you start talking to somebody and instead of getting mad, they get more interested, they ask more questions, they all of a sudden start feeling the enormity of their sin, they realize they've sinned against a holy God, that they deserve to be judged, and they want to be saved, and they want to follow Jesus, and they want to turn from their sin, you know you've got the real deal happening there. [There is] none of this manipulation, none of this, "Well, you know, I'll tell you what. If you just pray this prayer. . . . If you just raise your hand. . . ." Listen, that's not how it works. It's a work of God in a person's heart. When God works in their hearts, people come—some fast, some slow, but they all come.

Look at the middle of [Luke 9:]23, where Jesus begins to explain what it means, what it costs, to be one of His disciples. Jesus says, "If anyone wishes to come after Me," the first thing is: "he must deny himself." Notice [that] Jesus doesn't say, "He must say 'no' to sin *sometimes*." He doesn't say that. He doesn't just say, "You need to deny yourself *at times*," or "You *should* deny yourself," but He says you *must* deny yourself. I know this is a hard pill to swallow for those who have been brainwashed with the self-love and self-esteem gospel, which has infiltrated the Church at every level and every bit of Christian literature, and books, and all kinds of things [as well]. Organizations such as Focus on the Family or the Minirth-Meier Clinic teach that people need to feel good about themselves, have good self-esteem, need to love themselves, because after all, how can you love

God if you don't love yourself? How can you love others if you don't love yourself? That teaching is antithetical to the Bible.

The problem is that people are born loving themselves too much. That's the problem. Think about it. Why do people get angry? [It's] because they don't get their way—love of self. Why do people get depressed? [It's] because they don't get what they want and they get into a funk—the love of self. Why do people get divorced? [It's] because they aren't getting what they want. Why do people kill [other] people? James tells us: “You lust and do not have; so you commit murder” [James 4:2]. That's why: the love of self. Sin is the love of and idolatry of self. People don't need to be told they're basically good and told that they need to love themselves, and to have good self-esteem. They need to be told, “You need to die to you because you're getting in the way of what God wants to do in you. You need to have ‘Christ in you, the hope of glory’ [Colossians 1:27], not you in you.” No, what people need to learn is how to die to self.

Paul, speaking of the Christian life says, in Galatians 5:24: “Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” What is he talking about there? Well, when you want things, you lust for things, you desire things. He says [that] those who know Jesus are those who have learned to say “no” to their sinful lusts. In Philippians 3:3–11, Paul explains that the Christian is to put no confidence in the flesh or [in] his personal strength or resources. [Paul] uses himself as an example. If you remember the text, he says, “You know, if anybody has a right to boast, it's me. I was born of the tribe of Benjamin, a very prestigious tribe. I was a Hebrew of Hebrews. I was circumcised on the eighth day according to the Law of Moses. You want to talk about fanatic? I was a Pharisee, the most strict, fanatical sect of Judaism. Not only that, according to the Law—that is, according to external obedience of the Law—I was *blameless*.” He did everything he was supposed to, externally. Now, you would think that with all that heritage and all that self-achievement, Paul would feel pretty good about himself. He'd have some good self-esteem, he'd really love himself

for being so wonderful. Instead, this is what he says about himself [in] Philippians 3:7[-11]:

But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish [a very mild translation of a word that means “dung, or manure”] so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

That, people, is diametrically opposed to self-esteem and self-love. Paul’s estimation, his self-esteem of himself, is recorded in 1 Timothy 1:12–13, where Paul says, “I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because” here’s his estimation of himself, “I acted ignorantly in unbelief.” Two verses later, in verses 15–16, he calls himself the “foremost” of sinners and the “chief” [KJV] of sinners. [That is a] good estimation, [a] biblical estimation, [and] good self-esteem.

David says in Psalm 51:17, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.” When you see yourself as a wayward sheep, as one who has sinned against God, as one who deserves judgment, deserves hell, cannot offer God anything, you’re finally getting to the place you need to be. You’re finally getting to the death-to-self stage. When Jesus calls us to deny ourselves, he uses the strongest

form of the command in the middle voice. The middle voice means [that] you [have] to participate. He calls you to willingly, of your own accord, say “no” to you, to set aside your desires, your wants, your lusts, and to bring your life into submission to Jesus.

Second, if you look at the text [in Luke 9], Jesus explains that Christians must not only deny themselves, but He clarifies what He is talking about by saying, “And take up [their] cross[es] daily.” I’m telling you, this raises the bar as high as it can be raised. You can’t raise it any higher than this. The cross was a symbol of death by crucifixion. The cross was an instrument by which people suffered a torturous death. Crucifixion is one of the most torturous methods of execution ever concocted by man.

When someone was [going to be] crucified, they were forced to carry their own cross. They would start carrying their cross from the place of judgment or from where they were in prison to the crucifixion site. You recall that Jesus was on His way, and because He had been beaten and hadn’t been given any food or water, and He was scourged, [and] He had lost so much blood, He couldn’t make it all the way and so somebody had to be forced to carry Jesus’ cross part of the way to finish up the journey to Golgotha.

Crosses were heavy pieces of timber. [They] might have weighed anywhere between 70 and 150 pounds, depending on how large the timbers were and how wet they were. Those of you who have been backpacking, you know that a fifty-pound pack is a burden. I mean, even when you have a nice, soft, cushy pack frame with padded shoulder straps and a big, thick, padded belt that [fits] snug around your waist to distribute the load in your hips, a fifty-pound pack is a burden. Well, multiply that times two or three and imagine what it would be like carrying a rough-[hewn] chunk of wood—a cross—through town in front of everyone. People [would be] looking on, [some] in horror, some laughing, some hissing, some jeering, some glad you’re being crucified because they needed some entertainment for the day. All the time, the edges of the cross are digging into your back and splinters are piercing your flesh. If you try to stop, even to adjust the load, there’s an

instant crack of the whip and some Roman soldier saying, “Get going!” You feel that searing pain run through your body. And to make things worse, you know that with every step you’re headed for unimaginable pain, more pain than you have ever experienced before. Every step takes you closer to monstrous misery. But you must take up your cross because that’s how it is. Everybody carries his own cross.

Once at the crucifixion site, several brawny men hold you down while another man with metal spikes and a hammer pounds big spikes through your flesh—through your wrists and through your ankles. (Archaeologists have found anklebones with the spikes still stuck in them.) In never-before-experienced pain and agony, you scream as you watch your body being nailed to the cross. Then several men pick up the cross with you nailed to it and they drop [it] in to a hole dug for the base of it, and you feel your flesh tear as they prop you up so everybody can watch you die slowly. This is just the beginning, because now you have expert torturers who [have been] trained to keep you alive as long as possible so you can suffer and be the best example you can possibly be of [what it means to cross] Rome. So they wake you up when you faint, and they give you water when you thirst, so you can die very slowly.

Crucifixion is death by torture perfected. Believe me, everybody that Jesus is speaking to in this text knew about it. I’m sure that when Jesus said, “You must deny yourself, and take up your *cross* . . .” people just [gasp]. I’m sure of it.

“Take up a cross?” Everyone knew what Jesus was referring to.

But Jesus wasn’t speaking of literal crucifixion. You say, “Well, how do you know that?” [I know that] because He says that we have to do it “daily,” and you can only be crucified literally once. So the question then remains: How does one take up his cross *daily* to follow Jesus? Well, first, what it doesn’t mean [is] putting up with your unreasonable boss, or enduring your nagging mother-in-law, or having to listen to your neighbor’s yapping dog, or bearing up under some sickness or trying circumstance. That is not taking up your cross. You hear people say, “Oh, we’ve all got our own crosses to

bear.” It’s true, but it doesn’t mean what they think it means. What they mean by that is, “Well, we don’t always get what we want.” Self-love again.

Remember that in [Luke 9:]22, Jesus predicted His death. We have an advantage because now we know from our side of the cross looking back what Jesus went through when He died. We can look at that, and I’ve come up with four primary principles concerning what it means to deny yourself and take up your cross. This is what it means. First, it must be voluntary. We know that Jesus voluntarily came to earth to offer Himself up as the Lamb of God. You remember in John 10:18, Jesus says, “No one takes My life from Me. I have the authority to lay it down, and I have the authority from the Father to take it up again. No one is killing Me” [author paraphrase]. He also said, “You know, I could call for legions of angels that would come to My rescue” [see Matthew 26:53]. Jesus died because He willingly offered Himself up.

Second, if you’re going to take up your cross, it must be an act of self-sacrifice, of dying to self. If you remember, Jesus prayed in the garden, “Father, if it be Your will, can we pass this stage? Can we get away from dying on the cross? Yet not My will, but Thine be done” [see Matthew 26:39]. [This] tells us [that] though He personally didn’t want to die on the cross, He was there to do what? Die to self and live for [what]? The Father’s will. And so, He then made His will the Father’s will by laying aside what He personally wanted and [doing] what was God’s will for Him.

Third, [taking up your cross] must be motivated by love for someone else, not love for self or personal gain. The Bible makes it clear that the reason God gave His only begotten Son was love—“God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son” [John 3:16]. He loved us even when we were dead in our transgressions and sins [see Ephesians 2:5; Colossians 2:13], He loved us while we were yet enemies [see Romans 5:10], while we were hostile [see Colossians 1:21–22]. He had set this love upon us, unconditionally loving those who were, in fact, unlovable.

Fourth, taking up your cross must involve the knowledge that pain is coming and a willingness to endure [it] for the sake of someone else. You

know, it's one thing for someone to trick you and say, "Hey, you want to come over for a barbeque and fun and games?" and then to tie you up and slowly torture you to death. It's another thing for them to say, "Hey, you want to come over so I can tie you up and slowly torture you to death?" And you just say, "OK." See, there's a whole different spectrum there. Jesus, knowing what would happen beforehand, [told] His disciples over and over, "I must suffer. I must die. I must be crucified and three days later raised again from the dead." Knowing all that would happen, [He] willingly went into it. And He did it for whom? [He did it] for you and for me—for someone else.

[If] you put these principles together, you [can] understand what Jesus is talking about when He says, "You must deny yourself [and] take up your cross daily." Jesus commands you to voluntarily set aside what you want to do with your life and live your life for Him, submitting every area of your life—your hobbies, your job, everything—to His will to give Him glory and honor. He has promised that sometimes this will involve suffering. People suffer to different degrees, but there is suffering. It may mean losing a job, losing a friend, losing a parent, losing a mother, losing children, losing whatever. Doing what is right, following God's Word, sometimes leads to pain—lots of pain. And so, when Jesus is saying, "Deny yourself and take up the cross," that is, in the words of the four spiritual laws pamphlet, "God's wonderful plan for your life."

The Lord and Savior Jesus Christ tells you here that you must murder self and live for God if you want to go to heaven. You take your idolatrous, self-seeking will by the throat, you hold it down, you slit its throat, you drain out its blood, you bury it in the ground, and then you keep watch over the grave because it has the power of self-resurrection. We all know this. You get so sick of certain sins in your life, if you're a Christian, that you just beg God with all your heart to "Get these things out of my life! I'm never doing that again!" Ten minutes later, you do it again. You confess it again, and bury it down there with repentance. This is what the Puritans

called the “mortification of sin.” “Mortification” [is] a fancy word meaning “death,” [the death] of sin in your life.

If you want to do more study on this, the best book I know of [on this subject] is written by Puritan John Owen. Considered by many to be the greatest theologian who has ever lived, Owen wrote three different treatises. The first was called *On the Mortification of Sin in a Believer*. Second, *Of Temptation*, and third, *The Nature, Power, Deceit and Prevalency of Indwelling Sin*. (The Puritans didn’t have cute titles.) These three works were later combined and there are modern versions today, so they aren’t in Elizabethan English. The [combined] work is titled *Sin and Temptation*. If you’re looking for a good book to go through in your small group, I double dog dare you [to use this one]. This book isn’t going to tell you you’re OK and I’m OK. It’s going to tell you how to keep your sin dead.

My favorite quote from the book is this. See if you can understand what this means: “Sin is never less quiet than when it seems to be most quiet, and its waters are for the most part deep, when they are still.” Every Christian knows what that means. You think that you’ve got some area taken care of, you’ve prayed that thing into dust, you’ve repented of it into oblivion, you’ve confessed it from one end of the spectrum to the other, you’ve memorized verses against it. It hasn’t even shown its head for months—you can’t even remember the last time you fell into it. Finally you say, “You know what? I think I can just turn my back on this burial plot and go after another sin.” You turn your back, and all of a sudden you feel the knife. It has jumped out of the grave and has run you through. “Sin is never less quiet than when it seems to be most quiet, and its waters are for the most part deep, when they are still.” It’s under there and just waiting for you to drop your guard.

Now, if you are out there and you’re thinking to yourself, “Jack, I think there must be some mistake. This isn’t the Christianity that I know about.” Then you don’t know Christianity. This is it. Jesus will say the same thing in Luke 14, but [much] stronger. That is a scary passage. It also appears in

Matthew 10 and 16 and Mark 8. Repeatedly in the gospels we are told to die to self, to crucify ourselves, to take up our crosses.

Third and finally, look at the last phrase in [Luke 9:]23. Jesus says: “And follow me.” Following Jesus means following in His footsteps, or to live the way He lived. Peter, in 1 Peter 2:21, says, “For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps.” Peter goes on to describe how Jesus suffered and died for us. Following Jesus means obeying Him. Jesus says in John 15:14: “You are My friends *if* you do what I command you” [emphasis added]. You *need* to do what Jesus commands you—not out of duty, not out of compulsion, not out of mere fear of hell, not in an effort to earn salvation, to make God like you so He’ll give you salvation. You need to do it because the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are God. Because they created everything, they created you, they give you your very life and you were created for the very purpose of giving them glory. It’s why you exist. That’s why [you need to do what Jesus commands].

Now, if you want to go into the New Testament and try and find verses that tell you how to follow Jesus, it’s the whole New Testament. [In fact,] the whole Bible is all about living for God. I’m just going to give you one example [of what the Bible says about living for God]. Turn to Ephesians 5. I’ll just show you this one text, [but] again, there are lots [of such texts]. But I want to show you this one because it brings to bear what we talked about earlier about works in relationship to salvation. Notice what Paul says starting in verse 1 of Ephesians 5:

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma. But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know with certainty,

that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.
[Ephesians 5:1–5]

Did you notice what he said in verse 5 there? Let's look at it one more time: "For this you know with certainty." Every Christian knows this. This is a no-brainer. What's a no-brainer? That "no immoral or impure person or covetous man"—all these things just amount to self-love [and] idolatry—"who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God." Now, was Paul teaching works salvation here? Obviously not. Paul is the champion who teaches us salvation is not by works but by grace and that we are justified by faith [see Romans 3:28]. So then why does Paul say [that] you must live for Christ and if you don't you don't go to heaven? If salvation is not by works, then why must you do works to get to heaven? Again, there are two ways to understand [the words] "in order to get to heaven." One is *causatively*: you must do good works in order to earn, merit, deserve, make God like you enough, so you can get to heaven. The other is *consequently*: you must do good works *because* salvation and the grace of God change you so you *want* to follow God.

You remember what the new covenant said in Jeremiah 31:[33], "I will put my Spirit in them and I will *cause* them to walk in My way" [author paraphrase] Cause them. "He who began a good work in you will" what? "Perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus" [see Philippians 1:6]. God will bring it to pass even when we are unfaithful. True salvation is a powerful work in a person's life, and if there's no fruit of salvation, if there's no obedience to Christ, we know with certainty that that person is not going to heaven.

Hendricksen, commenting on [Luke 9:]23, says [the verse] might be paraphrased [like] this:

If anyone wishes to be counted as my adherent, he must once and for all say farewell to self, decisively accept pain, shame,

and persecution for my sake and in my cause—day in, day out—and must then keep on following me as my disciple. He must subject himself to my discipline.

Hendricksen goes on to warn that this text is not to be taken chronologically. Jesus is not saying, “First, you must deny yourself for a while, then you must take up your cross for a while, figuratively speaking, and then you must follow Me for a while, and then you can live for yourself and sin all you want.” This is cumulative: You must always be denying yourself, taking up your cross, and following Jesus. Jesus’ followers follow Him because Jesus makes them, by His grace, followers. “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me” [John 10:27]. The New Testament is replete with texts like this.

Now, I know what some of you are thinking out there because [you] tell me after the service. I’ll just save you from walking up [at the end of the service]. You’re thinking to yourself, “But, Jack, I can’t say I’ve just totally turned from every sin and never looked back, and that I’ve just reached this state of Wesleyan perfection. I’m a sinner. I’m a sinner big time. You’re scaring me, now, because I don’t know if I’m saved or not.” Well, listen, the Bible says that everyone sins—even believers [see Romans 3:23]. For instance, 1 John 1:8 says, “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.” He goes on to say in verse 9: “If we confess our sins,” and he uses an active tense there—“If we are always in the process of confessing our sins,” which means we’re always in the process of sinning—“He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

There will always be continual forgiveness for those who continue to sin. The righteous man falls seven times but he rises again. The Scriptures teach that the Christian life is a battle against sin. You don’t come to Christ, repent, believe, and become perfect. But listen to me: There is a progression. There is a path. There is an average inclination upward in holiness because God says He will do it. God says He will perfect you [see Philippi-

ans 1:6]. God says He will change you from one glory to the next. God does it. Listen, I'm not talking about perfection here. I'm talking about when you look back at last month, and the last six months, and the last year, are you growing in holiness, [in] your knowledge of the Word, [in] your service to the Body, [in] your sacrifice for Christ, [in] prayer, [in] witnessing to people, [in] doing normal Christian stuff?

And you know what? If you look and you just go, "Well..." if you have to search, you know with certainty what the case is. You know with certainty because the Scriptures tell you with certainty. It's not about calling yourself a Christian. It's about being transformed from the inside out by God's grace. If you don't know Jesus, then you need to come to Him this morning. You just need to cry out to Him, and say, "God, I am a sinner. I know I'm a sinner. I know I'm not saved. I know I don't have the right motives. I know I've been faking it," and just beg Him to save you. The Scriptures say, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name" [John 1:12].

So whatever you're living for now, whether it's your hobby, your job, money, pleasures, whatever, turn your back on that, and say, "Sorry, you're not my god anymore. I've got a new God, the God-Man Christ Jesus, and I'm going to receive Him, believe [in] Him, trust that His person, His death, His resurrection, is enough and only enough to save me. Nothing I do [will save me]." When you do that, when you cry out to God in your heart and you mean that, I want you to know, you'll only do it because of God's Spirit within you. God will transform you from one glory to the next. You will become a new creature [see 2 Corinthians 5:17], you will never be the same, you will hunger for the Bible, hunger for righteousness.

You know, there are times in my life [when] I wish I could read the Bible more. You may think, "Well, Jack, don't you kind of study all day?" Not all day—I wish I could. But you know, there are even times [when], even in the midst of studying more, I just want to study more. I don't want to have to prepare for somebody [else]. I just want to sit down and read

my Bible. Sometimes there are things that get in the way, just like there are things that get in the way when you want to read the Bible. But I'm telling you, it never goes away. The longer I go without just having some time in the Word, the more I hunger. It's like going without food, and I'm starving. I'm starving.

Finally, it's like, "I don't care. I'm reading my Bible!" I sit down and I just read through it and fill up my soul.

If you don't know that [urge], and you think, "Well, my Bible's not a big deal," you're dead, you're spiritually dead. Hell waits for you if you do not repent. Jesus came to this earth to save you. He's already paid the price, He has died on the cross, He has made the provision, and He has told me to tell you that if you repent and believe, trusting in what He did on the cross, you will be saved and He will transform your life forever.

There was a faithful Anglican minister who spent the last twenty-three years of his life [ministering] to humble fishermen in the town of Devonshire, England. [There was a] little, tiny church there when he got there. He had bad health, and yet he labored with all of his might for twenty-three years to serve that community, to preach the gospel. He built up a Sunday school of more than 800 children and it was said that the entire community was changed because of this one faithful, sickly preacher. What he liked to do in his spare time was write poetry and hymns. One of his hymns is based on our text: Luke 9:23. I want to read it, and as I read it, I want you to think if this is your experience, if you know what he's talking about. Henry wrote this:

Jesus, I my cross have taken,
All to leave and follow Thee.
Destitute, despised, forsaken,
Thou from hence my all shalt be.
Perish ev'ry fond ambition,
All I've sought and hoped and known!
Yet how rich is my condition:

God and heav'n are still my own!

Let the world despise and leave me.
They have left my Savior, too.
Human hearts and looks deceive me.
Thou art not, like man, untrue.
And while Thou shalt smile upon me,
God of wisdom, love, and might,
Foes may hate, and friends may shun me;
Show Thy face, and all is bright!

Haste thee on from grace to glory,
Armed by faith and winged by prayer.
Heav'n's eternal days before thee,
God's own hand shall guide thee there.
Soon shall close thy earthly mission,
Swift shall pass thy pilgrim days;
Hope shall change to glad fruition,
Faith to sight, and prayer to praise!

Every Christian knows that, knows what it means, feels that life is but a vapor, like their life is running out, like they need to do more for Christ, and they are continually seeking to set aside self and follow Jesus. If that's not you, make it you this morning. Jesus is there before you, He has paid the price, and He says, "Believe in Me, and I will give you the free gift of eternal life." Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for this text. It is a very strong text, a text that challenges our thinking—especially the weak gospel and the false views of Christianity prevalent in the world. Father, I pray that we would remember [that] our life is but a short vapor that is here for a little while and then is gone [see James 4:14]. That we would not be so foolish as to trade a drop of pleasure for a sea of wrath. That, Father, we would give ourselves

for Christ in this life that we might live and have eternal life with You and unimaginable blessings for all eternity. For those who are here, Father, who don't know You, who realize they don't know You, Father, bring conviction upon their souls. Help them to realize that judgment is coming unless they repent. And, Father, grant them the grace they need to turn from their sins and receive the Lord Jesus Christ. We know Your Word says: "That if we confess with our mouths Jesus as Lord, and believe in our hearts that God raised Him from the dead, we will be saved" [see Romans 10:9]. So, Father, make that happen in hearts this morning. And, Father, for the rest of us, may we seek You, ever denying ourselves, ever taking up our crosses, ever following You more and more each and every day until we die and go to be with You or until You come back for us in glory. Father, we pray all these things in Your name because we know it's Your will, Amen.

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