

align themselves with those who formally praise Him, but, in substance, they reject Him!

- d. This rejection, in the light of the sufficiency of the signs that validate all that He says of Himself, eliminates the claim to be an "honest doubter." There may remain many doubts, but they can no longer be called "honest."

**CONCLUSION:** Let us not praise Jesus superficially, pretending to say something important about Him, when we have no intention to go all the way with Him in sacrificial service. Let us praise Him, confessing Him for what He really is: the Christ, the Son of the living God, King of kings and Lord of lords!

But let us praise Him with a solid understanding of what we believe about Him! Our faith, if it is to be mature, must not be a sheltered house-plant, unaware of the options, untested by the winds of opposition from hostile opinions. We must be aware of these low views of Christ's essential identity and glory, we must test them and be prepared to be loyal to our convictions, despite the fact that we may remain a small minority in the world.

### SPECIAL STUDY:

#### THE COST OF OUR SALVATION

During His ministry of approximately three years Jesus of Nazareth, with fiery words of eternal wisdom, set the skies ablaze over Judea and Galilee, announcing the most important news man was ever to hear! He raised no army, laid and collected no taxes, put on no robes of royalty. Yet, His sudden rise to the public eye was very little short of being as spectacular as that of any historic revolutionary. The common people heard Him gladly. At first, the leaders of Judaism listened with an interest which turned sour, first into disgust, then bitter hatred. Jesus stormed the capital of the Jews and wrought havoc right in the sacred precinct by raising embarrassing questions, exposing Pharisaic hypocrisy, and by claiming for Himself the nomenclature which was exclusively Messianic. Characteristically, He demonstrated His most magnificent claims by producing the most inescapable proof—"mighty works, wonders, and signs, which God did by Him in the midst" of those who most wanted to disclaim and destroy such proof. And yet, whether in the midst of the haranguing

in the Temple, or during the storm-tossed boating experiences on Lake Tiberias, or by intercepting the funeral procession at Nain, or in the midst of the popularity of the multitudes on many occasions, this Jesus proved Himself to be the Christ, the Son of God to those whose hearts made them willing. Later, Jesus was to die for all men of all times. In that death the punishment for sin was to be meted out upon the Son of God, although He had lived a pure life among sinners of every description!

At this mighty demonstration of God's living in human flesh we at first can only marvel. We are challenged by His words, awe-stricken by His works. Desiring to hear more of His lessons on the Kingdom of God, we join the crowds pressing around Him as He speaks to the great multitudes in Perea. Like everyone else in that vast audience, we listen breathlessly for some clue as to when He will accept our crown, march into Jerusalem, overthrow our oppressors, and establish God's Kingdom into which we can press. There have been reliable reports from Galilee, the Decapolis and northern Perea that Jesus fed more than 5,000 people on one occasion and upwards of 4,000 on another. At least some of the eyewitnesses of those events have suggested that the Nazarene could do this indefinitely, feeding our armies, reducing famines to a memory of the past, healing our sick and wounded,—even to the point of raising all our dead!

Quiet! He is seating Himself on that boulder to teach:

If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build, and was not able to finish.' (Lk. 14:26-30)

We stop listening, puzzled by His words as He goes on to speak of kings and salt. We listen as He gets through to us once more, "So therefore, whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."

Questions race through our minds: Do you mean to say, Master, that it costs something to be your disciple? Who pays this cost? What do you mean by "self-denial"? (I thought that you were going to provide what we did not have, and that we would get to keep what

is already ours!) How must we renounce all that we have? What is this "cross-bearing"? We heard John say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." What does repentance have to do with it?

Here are some answers to our questions:

### I. DISCIPLESHIP (and its end product, SALVATION) IS EXPENSIVE!

No expense has meaning except for those who must pay the cost. Therefore, to WHOM is the charge laid for the salvation of man?

A. It cost GOD THE FATHER AND CHRIST THE SON to purchase our salvation! The souls of men were up for sale on the world market and God in His love paid the highest price Heaven could afford to buy men back. Our redemption cost God many heartbreaks and bitter tears as He dealt patiently with a capricious nation, so He could raise up a family through which His Son could come. It cost Christ the humiliation of the death for sinners whom He had come to save. It cost God the best blood of earth—that of His prophets and apostles who laid down their lives in confirmation of their testimony to God's truth. It cost God countless billions of blessings to lead men by the goodness of His Providence. Yes, even before the world was formed, God counted the cost and cried out, "I will pay it!"

B. It cost the gracious HOLY SPIRIT Who strove with men before the flood, signified God's truth by means of the ancient prophets, and at the present works through the Word of God, which He Himself guaranteed. It costs Him to live in the often unclean temples of our bodies. But He too, agonizing with straying sheep, cried out, "I will pay it!"

C. It costs the WOULD-BE DISCIPLES also. Christ reads our hearts and foresees the future. He knows that we, the multitudes, will fall away from Him, and many would even cry out? "Crucify! Crucify! Away with Him!" And so He sifts the crowds by explaining in the boldest terms possible, that His salvation, His discipleship, His Kingdom, is going to cost the would-be disciple something too!

### II. THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP AND SALVATION STATED

What is the cost of salvation to us? Why does the Lord demand it? "I thought that salvation was to be a free gift!" someone would object. But is not the very nature of the grace of God its undeserved blessing at the cost only of the One who extends it? Paul emphasizes this, answering affirmatively:

But God's free gift is not at all to be compared with the offense. For if by one man's offence the whole race of men have died, to a much greater degree God's favor and His gift imparted by His favor through the one man Jesus Christ, has overflowed for the whole race of men. And the gift is not at all to be compared with the results of that one man's sin. For that sentence resulted from the offence of one man, and it meant condemnation; but the free gift resulted from the offenses of many, and it meant right standing. For if by one man's offense death reigned through that one, to a much greater degree will those who continue to receive the overflow of His unmerited favor and His gift of right standing with Himself, reign in real life through One, Jesus Christ.

(Romans 5:15-17, Williams' translation.)

God's gifts are described as free, truly enough. However, the main feature of God's free gift—a feature that is so often totally by-passed,—is that it is the free opportunity to extricate oneself by the power of Christ from the entangling alliances with sin. The opportunity is free, yet priceless! The laying hold of this opportunity is the expensive item to all concerned—this is the crux of the matter.

From what is this great salvation accomplished? SIN which finds its origin in the very person of man himself.

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one; but each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown brings forth death. (James 1:13-15)

For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a man.

(Mark 7:21-23)

This harmonizes perfectly with Jesus' requirement: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself . . ." (Mt. 16:24; Lk. 9:23) Thus, Jesus is also placing before men a great paradox: a discipleship which leads to a priceless salvation to be received as a free, unearned gift, and, at the same time, He lays down the unmistakable terms at which that salvation may be had. The very consideration that our pure, righteous God would, and did, extend terms of surrender to a rebellious human-kind is the very summit definition

of grace!

What is this "self-denial" of which Jesus speaks: "If a man hate . . . not his own life also, he cannot be my disciple."? Let us first decide what "self-denial" is not, and so draw the circle to include only what Jesus meant.

1. Christ has not asked us to deny ourselves of this or that luxury, but to deny OURSELVES! Some early preacher described the deadly cancer of self as manifesting itself as:

- a. Self-will, the desire to be outside the law of obedience, i.e. above the responsibility to obey.
- b. Self-interest, the desire to be outside the law of sacrifice, i.e. free from the responsibility to sacrifice self for others.
- c. Self-sufficiency, the desire to be outside the law of fellowship, i.e. no sense of responsibility for others.

The whole scheme of redemption pictures the best love of man for himself as this is appropriately expressed in his willingness to save himself from the power, guilt and consequences of sin in himself. Man rightly cares for his own true, best life and wishes it to be developed and strengthened. (Eph. 5:28, 29; Mt. 22:39) Indeed, in the first gospel message, Peter urged the proper kind of self-preservation: "Save yourselves from this crooked generation!" (Ac. 2:40) This prevents us from misconstruing Jesus' words.

2. Similarly, Christ is not asking us to deny ourselves whatever is good and needful for strengthening of our spiritual or physical life. Jesus taught that fasting, for its own sake, was incompatible with the genius of the Kingdom of God, which "is not eating or drinking [or lack of it, HEF], but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." (Romans 14:17; also Mt. 9:14-17) All other forms of asceticism must bend to this same plan. (Col. 2:20-23) All real values are those which develop character and lead to eternal life. God let Solomon write from personal experience that all seeking after worldly ambitions, wealth, self-satisfactions of all kinds, including self-righteousness through severity to the body, is vanity. Life does not consist so much in what we live ON, as in the proper understanding of what we live FOR. Mere renunciation of the abundance of possessions, without renouncing the love of abundance, fails to understand the Lord. Denial of this love of possessions is the only proper preparation to use abundance appropriately as an administration assigned by the Lord.

3. Nor is it true "self-denial" what is done merely as self-denial.

True self-denial, like all other forms of Christ-likeness, is unconscious of self, "does not know that its face shines." We deny nothing when we give up certain foods on certain days, abstain from social dissipation during certain seasons, and many other useless and uncalled-for sacrifices. Can it be true self-denial for man to dictate to the Lord which sacrifices he shall make, merely because he supposes that some endeavor at renunciation is in order, whether or not the Lord has ordered it? Should the Master will that we join Him in the wedding joy of the new life, must we be anguished because pain and suffering are distant, and so invent self-inflicted abnegation, or "manufacture artificial crosses out of ascetic austerities"? (Bruce, *Training*, 179)

4. Nor is self-control—as the world understands it—equal to self-denial, for the former is the control of the lower elements of our being by the higher, whereas self-denial means that both higher and lower elements of our being are to be treated as elements of the former life to which we have died. It is here that Paul's paradox has significance:

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Gal. 2:20)

Having seen what it is not, we must now ask: what is self-denial?

1. Self-denial is self stepping down from life's throne, laying crown and scepter at the Master's feet and thenceforth submitting the whole of life to His control. It is living out our life, not to please ourselves, but to please our Lord, not to advance our own personal interests, but to do His work. It is the glad making of any sacrifice that loyalty to Him requires. Self gives way altogether as the motive of life.

2. "As Peter said when he denied Christ, 'I know not the man,' so say thou of thyself, and act accordingly." (Bengel) We are instructed by the grace of God which brings salvation that "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world. . . ." (Titus 2:11f) "Worldly lusts" (*tàs kosmikàs epithumías* = "the earthly desires") need not be worse than the usual aspirations common to this earth, aspirations which become so all-important. It may be nothing worse than the animal instinct of self-preservation that thinks only of self-interest, but not of duty. There is no stronger normal human desire than to live, yet even this

too may be renounced in the line of duty, as Jesus so definitively proved. Jesus has not required abnegation of the self that loves God with the heart, soul, mind and strength, and serves its neighbor because of love "as yourself." Rather, what the Master demands is the total renunciation of that rebellion that brought sin into the world originally and still maintains it in all of its forms. Herein is the paradox true: "For whosoever would save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it." (Mt. 16:25; Lk. 9:24)

3. Self-denial is also the yielding of our right to choose anything but the will of Christ. Having accepted Jesus as the Lord of our conscience and will, emotions and intellect, we obey one law. His slightest wish is our highest command! When we became His slaves, we surrendered our right to a choice, although not our power to choose. (Cf. 2 Cor. 5:15)

No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. (Lk. 16:13; Mt. 6:24)

Whatever self-denial must mean to the disciple, Christ has already shown us in one lasting, concrete example. (Ro. 15:3) Listen to His claims:

"Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say, 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify thy name." (John 12:27f)

"Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, . . . 'Lo, I have come to do thy will, O God,' " (Heb. 10:5-7)

"Jesus answered them, 'My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me.' " (Jn. 7:16)

"And he who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him." (Jn. 8:29)

"I glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work which thou gavest me to do." (Jn. 17:4)

Peter shows how His self-denial is the model for ours:

"For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

He committed no sin; no guile was found on his lips. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered he did not threaten; but he trusted to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness . . .” (1 Pt. 2:21ff)

4. Self-denial is all that is implicit in obedience. For . . .

“Do you not know that if you yield yourselves to any one as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?” (Romans 6:16)

There is also implied the overcoming faith in the One to whom the obedience is yielded and for whose sake self is renounced. Jesus calls us to take up His yoke upon us and learn of Him. (Mt. 11:29) When we have decided to wear His yoke, the question becomes, not what we shall choose, but, what is it that He has chosen for us? His yoke is His will for us, His rule, His discipline.

5. Self-denial is the crucifixion of self, “the old life with its passions and desires.” (Gal. 5:24; Ro. 6:6) It is not merely the putting self off for a later date, but the immediate and total sacrifice of anything that stands between the disciple and totally-surrendered, loving service to his Lord.

6. Self-denial is the power behind repentance just as godly sorrow for sin and the desire to start a new life is the motivation. Self-denial, like repentance, must be in the present tense. To make up one’s mind that he will, in some undefined future time, deny himself, is not at all self-denial. What is this but a determination to continue in self-satisfaction still other days and years? Such a resolution is an indication of a deep-seated impenitence, since it agrees to the rectitude of Christ’s demands, but refuses obedience. It has been said that the way to Hell is paved with good intentions. This cannot be true, because good resolutions do not lead away from God, and a resolution to repent, or deny self, at a more convenient season,—but not now,—is not a good intention! If God should consent to any postponement of self-denial, He would become accessory to a sinful life.

Self-denial, like repentance, involves an abhorrence of all sin, especially the soul’s own personal sins. It involves a recognition of his personal guilt before God, and that he needs to repent! The soul acknowledges the justice of the divine law and its own condemnation



by it. It puts itself in the wrong and God in the right. It utters the prayer of the publican, "God be merciful to me—a SINNER!"

Self-denial, likewise, implies the renunciation of all sin. There can be no mental reservation, no "darling sins" not given up. It would be but an insult to God to make a catalogue of sins and say, "These I loath and renounce"; and compose another list and say, "These I cannot surrender; these, my dishonesty, my covetousness, my impurity, my wicked ambition, I love and will not forsake." To deny self with the purpose in mind to continue in sin, any sin, is impossible. To repent with the idea that it is only a formality in order to be forgiven, and so that a life of continued sin and continued repentance may finish in heaven, is but wicked self-deception. Such an intention is an abuse of the grace of repentance.

Self-denial involves the soul's seeing itself in the light of God's Word, seeing the nature of sin—the number, the heinousness, and the aggravation of HIS OWN sins. It involves seeing how his sin mars and pollutes his own soul, how it destroys and injures his fellow-man; how it defies God's authority, tramples on His love and compels the out-pouring of His wrath. This self-knowledge is exceedingly difficult to attain. It is unwelcome and painful. This knowledge tortures the soul, and we would rather be ignorant of it. Hence the memory comes reluctantly to its work and the past is imperfectly remembered. The law of God is obscured and misinterpreted, and the moral judgment is weakened and biased. Weak excuses are formed and the guilty soul seeks to hide itself behind a "refuge of lies." This is why denial of self must take place before intelligent approach to God is even possible.

It may even be unnecessary to differentiate between "repentance" and "self-denial." Further, Jesus spoke of "cross-bearing," a figure which seems to be but another facet of the diamond of total acceptance of Himself. What is "cross-bearing"? This is best answered by asking another question: what did it mean to Jesus? The occasions in Galilee when Jesus placed this challenge before His disciples were occasions on which Jesus had clearly predicted His own death. This expression must mean that the disciple must be as his Lord.

Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. (Phil. 2:5-8)

Study the expressions Paul used: "emptied himself," "humbled himself," "obedient unto death," "death of the cross."

1. To Jesus, cross-bearing symbolized one thing: providing the needed sacrifice to save the individual sinner by undergoing whatever was necessary to do that. It meant His facing the mocking unbelief, the cruel jeering and the lashing of the scourge, the spitting, the injustice, and the separation from His Heavenly Father. It meant willingness to bear the pain that others' faults bring. It meant not pleasing Himself, but serving others. (Ro. 15:1-3)

2. To the individual sinner who aspires to discipleship "cross-bearing" means the positive identification of himself with the sufferings of Christ on his behalf. It was the Apostle's one desire to grow to "know Him and the power of His resurrection, and share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death." (Phil. 3:10f) Cross-bearing, to Paul, implied the dying daily to his own self-will: "I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified." (1 Co. 9:27)

3. Did Jesus ever speak of our heroically or sentimentally bearing His cross? No, because He bore ours in order to furnish us with sufficient motive and opportunity to bear our own! We are not, therefore, to manufacture artificial crosses for ourselves, but accept the cross which Christ has called us to bear and die upon it.

4. Cross-bearing means the willing, cheerful suffering of the loss of all things for "the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." (Phil. 3:8) If that means the loss of "father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters" who stand as stumbling blocks to our feet, we must crucify that this-worldly affection, in favor of our heavenly loyalty to Christ. Obviously, cross-bearing in practice must mean different things to different people. Bruce (*Training*, 177) teaches:

For one the cross may be the calumnies of lying lips, "which speak grievous things proudly and contemptuously against the righteous"; for another, failure to attain the much-worshipped idol success in life, so often reached by unholy means not available for a man who has a conscience; for a third, mere isolation and solitariness of spirit amid uncongenial, unsympathetic neighbors, not minded to live soberly, righteously and godly, and not loving those who do so live.

How are "self-denial" and "cross-bearing" related to each other?

They are, respectively the negative and positive aspects of our total commitment to Christ. They are carefully linked by Paul:

And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires . . . But far be it from me to glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. (Gal. 5:24; 6:14)

### III. THE REASONS FOR PAYING THIS COST

Having considered who pays this cost and the definitions of the cost, let us ask ourselves: why pay the cost of our salvation? God freely gives sinful man the gracious opportunity to become a disciple of Jesus and be saved by meeting the terms of discipleship. These terms, negatively and positively stated, are "self-denial" and "cross-bearing," and all that these involve. Historically, there have been very few who, having counted the cost, were willing to pay it. Jesus described such a state of affairs like this:

Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few. (Mt. 7:13f)

During His earthly ministry Jesus contacted one of the world's best prospects for discipleship. The young man was rich, ambitious, righteous by most standards, apparently humble and highly talented. The Master placed the cost of discipleship before him, but he turned it down! The question has probably already been asked: why, if so many who could mean so much to the Kingdom turn down Jesus' offer, does Jesus not make the cost lower, the "cross" lighter, the burden easier? Because, were the Lord to do so, He would be re-admitting to His household, into His Kingdom, the very element that exalted Satan, cursed mankind and turned the world into a cemetery in the first place: SELF! To make the demands less stringent, God would have to open the gates to allow mankind with all its sinful trappings of self-centeredness to pour into His promised land, reserved only for those who are willing to deny self and exalt Christ. Self-complacency, being the very heart and core of all sin, would, in this reversed case, require God to refuse to condemn any sin. But in all this, what would have become of the pure, righteous Creator

of all, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? He would have become unjust Himself and not to be trusted to be right or the One to right the wrongs of earth. Vengeance would then belong to anybody who can take it! Law and order would no longer exist, save in those remnants of society still influenced by the ancient concepts of the justice and mercy of God.

But God is not a man that He should charge! And, since He has not, we are faced with the decision to count the cost and pay it and receive His proffered mercy, or face the consequences. Why pay the cost?

1. If we are unwilling to start the journey by the strait and narrow way, because of the call of our luxury or possessions, or because the desires of family, friends, social or business life must be satisfied before the Lord's desires, or for some other reason, we judge ourselves unworthy of His offered mercy. The ultimate end of such a course must be punishment. However high we may hold our heads, they shall at last be bowed before Jesus!

2. Why pay? Because, if one were to start the long, arduous journey of discipleship, but decide to give it up, he is just as lost as if he had never started. By the very nature of the case, this cost must be constantly and consistently paid. So subtle are the temptations to indulge self that every disciple must "watch and pray that they enter not into temptation." Consider these warnings:

For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not sit down and count the cost first, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, "This man began to build, and was not able to finish." Or what king, going to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and take counsel whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends an embassy and asks terms of peace.

(Lk. 14:28-32)

And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy; but these have no root, they believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away. And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.

(Lk. 8:13-15)

. . . No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God. (Lk. 9:62)

These are tragic words! There is no disaster so great as that of a life started out on its course heavenward, only to see it sink beneath the waves of doubt and selfishness miles and years from the blest harbor!

3. Consider the psychological future of selfishness vs. selflessness:

Those who are selfish and who do only that which pleases their fancy, and who will not exert themselves for some high principle, will find that their range of dislikes will increase and their range of likes will decrease. As time goes on, life becomes more and more filled with disagreeable things until the selfish life becomes the doomed life. He who does things for Christ's sake is responding to something higher than his personal inclinations. This leads to a steady increase of one's "range of interests, likes, and success" and the fuller life is the reward of the giving up of a selfish life. "No discovery of modern psychology is, in my opinion, so important as its scientific proof of the necessity of self-sacrifice or discipline to self-realization and happiness."

(James Bales, *Jesus the Ideal Teacher*, 40)

4. The biggest inducement to pay this expense is the realization that it leads to life eternal. But some who genuinely count the cost, studying the standards of the Kingdom, cry out, "It's too difficult! For fear of falling, I will not attempt to rise! I will not try!" But the tower **MUST** be built; the battle **MUST** be fought; the Kingdom of God **MUST** be sought at any price and above all. Jesus "endured the cross, despising the shame," and we can too! Hear Him again as He challenges all men:

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If any one serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there shall my servant be also; if any one serve me, the Father will honor him. (Jn. 12:24ff)

. . . Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. (Mark 10:29f)

We are never better off than when we are completely ready to let God have the really great opportunity He wants. When we lay ourselves prostrate on our own cross, denying ourselves of all right to live, conscious of our total inability to save ourselves, then and only then are we in the best frame of mind to receive all that He has to offer. What a paradox: He takes away from us all things that He might truly give us all things!

#### IV. SELF-DENIAL AND CROSS-BEARING IN PRACTICE

Having seen something of the theory, we must ask ourselves how this works out in practice. Otherwise, what was intended for our daily growth in faith and likeness to Christ, will become a dead, useless concept, unconnected with our real way of thinking and acting.

In the general field of self-denial and cross-bearing there are actually two areas of application. On the one hand, there is death to self's desires that lead into sin in any and all of its forms. (Col. 3:5; Gal. 5:24) On the other, there is that renunciation of one's legitimate rights for love of another person. Since the reader is more likely to be familiar with the numerous examples of the former with which the New Testament is replete, let us examine a very few of the countless expressions of self-denial in the latter area.

##### A. JESUS IS OUR MODEL

He denied Himself by surrendering legitimate rights of His own free will for the sake of others. (Study Romans 15:3 in the context of Romans 14 and 15:1-7; Phil. 2:5-8 in the context of Phil. 2:1-4; Eph. 5:25 in the context of Eph. 5:21-33; cf. Heb. 3:1; 12:2, 3; note 1 Pt. 2:21ff in the context of 1 Pt. 2:18-20; 3:18 in the context of 3:13-22; 4:1-6; 4:13 in the context of 4:12-19) GOD, too, labored un-sparingly for us! (Ro. 8:32)

##### B. APPROPRIATE CONCERN FOR OTHERS' NEEDS IS OUR STANDARD.

In order to take many NT exhortations seriously, we must deny ourself some other use of our time and energies in other perfectly

proper, completely justifiable Christian activities. Thousands of thoroughly enjoyable human pleasures, such as reading, listening to music, flower arrangement, keeping one's home in perfect order, painting and all hobbies, while innocent themselves, can—and, on certain occasions, must be—set aside, in order to have time to express our concern for others. These activities are perfectly legitimate within themselves, and the Christian need not fear God's frown upon them as they engage in them, since He Himself has left him free to choose his activities. However, the question of priorities asks the Christian: "Which comes *first now*: your neighbor's needs or your own comforts and hobbies?"

As every serious, busy pastor knows, counseling with people takes time. Solutions must be examined. People's problems do not respect clocks or follow schedules. This means that a Christian who would really be of help to his fellows must be available. But availability means being "on call" at any time, and, as any doctor or ambulance driver knows, self-denial is the order of the day. Doctors cannot say, "I'm sorry that I cannot respond to your emergency, because I'm listening to Beethoven!" Rather, they deny their right to enjoy Beethoven and rush down to the emergency room. When Eutychus fell out of the third-story window, Paul did not insist on continuing his inspired speech, but rushed down with the others to do what he could for the lad. (Ac. 20:7-12)

### C. HOW TO GO ABOUT IT

1. Consider the following encouragements to deny ourselves in order to be available to meet others' needs: Ro. 12:3-21; 14—15:7; 1 Co. 6:12—10:33; 11:33; 12:7, 25; 13:1-7; 14:all; 16:16; 1 Pt. 4:10.

2. All encouragements to be generous in giving to others' needs are incitements to spend for others what we have a right to spend on ourselves. See 2 Co. 8, 9; Gal. 6:6, 10; Eph. 4:28; 5:15f; Col. 4:5f; 1 Ti. 5:4, 8, 16; 6:18f.

3. All exhortations to love and serve one another require self-denial to carry them out. See Gal. 5:13f; 6:1-5; Eph. 5:21—6:9, 18; Phil. 2:1-4; 4:3; Col. 3:18—4:1; 1 Th. 2:8; 5:14f; 2 Th. 3:6-13; 1 Ti. 6:1f; Tit. 3:8, 14; 1 Pt. 2:18ff; 3:1-8; 1 Jn. 3:16-18.

4. Consider these examples that show us how it is done. Paul would have been willing even to sacrifice his own salvation, if this would accomplish the salvation of his fellow Hebrews. (Ro. 9:3) Remember

the Apostles' self-denial for their churches (1 Co. 4:8-13; 6:12—10:33; 2 Co. 4:2, 7-15; 5:13; 6:1-13; 11:7-11, 23-29; 12:14ff; 13:9; Phil. 1:23-26; 1 Th. 2:9-12; 3:10; 2 Th. 3:7-9; 2 Ti. 2:10. Remember the Apostles' letter-writing ministry: that took time to edify their readers!

5. Others devoted themselves to serve other Christians with needed refreshment: 1 Co. 16:15f; 2 Co. 8:1-5; 2 Ti. 1:16-18; Heb. 6:10; 13:1-3; 3 Jn. 5-8, 10b.

6. The rules governing Christian liberty require that we deny ourselves. (See Special Study: "How To Avoid Becoming a Pharisee" after 15:1-20, which discusses some of these rules.) Perhaps some narrow-souled Christian demands to know where in the Bible it says he must do some particular act of kindness that he does not want to, or do without some pleasure for the sake of someone else. The New Testament was not written to cater to such legalism, but to stimulate us to want to rise above the demands of mere, legal rules, to live a life guided by the Spirit of Christ, inwardly motivated to seek out practical, helpful kindnesses by which we can bless our neighbor. However, the New Testament guarantees our liberty to do this and guides our decisions concerning it. But the very principles that set us free from casuistic legal restrictions require that through love we become servants of one another. (Cf. Gal. 5:13; Ro. 14—15:7; 1 Co. 6:12—10:33; Jas. 1:25-27; 2:8, 12; 1 Pt. 2:16; 3:8; 4:8-10; 5:5)

7. Christian exhortation and teaching takes time, energy and dedication! If time is money, then denying ourselves the use of our time as our own, in order to bring back a sinner from the error of his way, is the same sort of sacrifice Jesus made. It takes time to care enough to go teach someone what he must know in order to please God. (Cf. Heb. 3:13; 10:24f; Gal. 6:1f; Jas. 5:19f; 1 Th. 5:11, 14; 2:11; Jude 22f. It takes self-denial to be gentle and forbearing with one's opponents who are what they are because they need to repent and because they are certain they know the truth better than the Christian servant. (2 Ti. 2:24-26) It takes self-denial to care about truth and falsity in life and doctrine. (Cf. Ro. 16:17-20; Eph. 5:11; 4:25; 2 Th. 2:11-15; 2 Ti. 1:14; 1 Ti. 4:16; 6:12, 20; Rev. 2:2, 3) It takes self-denial to refuse to make use of what appeals to human pride, in order to proclaim the truth, and hold to the truth despite the powerful temptations to trust human wisdom to be more certain. (Cf. 1 Co. 1:18-31; 2:1-5; 3:18-23)

8. Tremendous self-discipline is required to be able to submit to



persecution of any sort, whether through public abuse or loss of possessions or family. But this willingness to suffer the loss of all things comes through the self-denial that admits that everything we are and have come from God, and, because of this recognition, turns it all over to God. This way, whatever happens to our possessions, our relationships, or to us, we are confident that everything is in good hands: Hrs! Self-denial, thus, is the secret behind the ability to rejoice and give thanks in all circumstances. (Cf. Phil. 4:4-7, 10-13; 1 Th. 5:18) No matter what evil is done to us, self-denial keeps us from paying back evil for evil. (1 Th. 5:15; 1 Co. 6:7) Even our "vengeance belongs to the Lord" (Cf. Ro. 12:17-21).

9. Submission to our own Christian leaders requires self-denial. (Cf. 1 Pt. 5:5; Heb. 13:17; 1 Th. 5:12f; 2 Th. 2:15; 3:6, 14; 1 Co. 11:2) Submission to the decision of others requires no little self-denial. (Cf. 1 Co. 6:1-6)

10. The kind of praying that needs to be done for our world, our Church and ourselves requires discipline and the time that only self-denial can furnish. (Cf. 1 Ti. 2:1, 2, 8; 1 Th. 5:17f; Eph. 6:18, etc.)

11. Growth in godliness requires self-denial which furnishes time, energy, interest and activity that will make character growth possible. (Cf. Eph. 4:15f; Phil. 3:12-15; Heb. 5:11—6:12; 12:3-17; 1 Ti. 4:7b, 8; 2 Ti. 2:3-7, 15; 1 Pt. 1:13-17; 2 Pt. 1:3-11)

There are many, many more texts and illustrations in the Word that could be listed here. But a good rule of thumb might be this: if you see something to do that you should not, either for yourself or others, do not do it. That is self-denial. If you see something good to do for someone else, something that, to do it, takes time that you would have used otherwise for something you would rather have done for yourself, do it. That is self-denial. Self-denial and cross-bearing, seen from this practical standpoint, are indubitably the price we must pay to be saved from ourselves and our sins, and in order to be of any practical use to Jesus. The only law of Christianity, as anyone knows, is to love God with all we have and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Self-denial is but this love in action. (See Notes on 5:44, 48; 7:12, Vol. I, pp. 311ff, 318ff, 415ff)