

The Self-Life – the Hindrance to the Spiritual Life

Review

God and His word commands, exhorts, and encourages believers to live a life entirely in the Spirit, to be filled in the Spirit of love, to walk according to the Spirit, to be free from all bondage (flesh, self, natural mind, world, Satan) in the Spirit, to have the Spirit indwelling us practically, and to continually experience the witness of the Spirit that we are sons of God. On one hand Christ has given the Spirit, and the Spirit is fully available to the church. On the other hand, Christians are most often immature, carnal, or ignorant of God's intention of salvation. What hinders the life God has promised us?

This article is part of a series of messages that address the life God intends His children to possess, enjoy, and live out in their daily lives. Many Christians sense that their life in Christ is not well-pleasing to God and they may or may not long to have their life set right. We all should ask, "Am I a carnal Christian?" and "Is it possible to live as God intends us to?" The answer to whether we admit being carnal (fleshly) or not determines whether we can grow spiritually. As we mentioned in a previous article, carnal believers are incapable of receiving and assimilating spiritual truth and therefore, remain immature spiritually, and slaves to sin practically. The answer to whether it is possible to live as God intends us to live is unequivocally, "yes!" In this message, we will expose what the problem and obstacle is, what God is willing and able to do for us, and offer steps we can take to pass out of the improper state into the life that is well pleasing to God.

This message is given out of love, and you need to set aside any tendency to merely read it as an exposition of truth. Christians have a terrible habit of going to church meetings, conferences, or other so-called spiritual events with the good intention to listen, to learn and to think, but their heart often remains untouched. It is possible, and all too often probable, that we get into the habit of listening to the most solemn, spiritual things without any practical result. Our lives do not change, and we are not conformed any further to the Lord's image. Therefore, we must repent for our dullness (Hebrews 5:11), confess our sin and carnal nature (1 John 1:7-10), and pray for God's presence (Hebrews 10:19-25) while considering these words. Also, ask the Lord to allow you to abide in His presence while seeking Him for light to expose if there is anything wrong, improper, or not well-pleasing within us (heart, mind, soul) [2 Corinthians 4:6; 1 Peter 2:9c]. And finally ask that God set it right." [Psalms 51:10-12] This kind of prayer and attitude exhibits a proper heart that hungers and thirsts after righteousness, which is manifested by our living, not just our words.

Previously, we considered two sides of the Christian life: (1) the carnal, fleshly side, in which a believer is continually defeated by sin, and (2) the spiritual side, in which the Holy Spirit infuses the believer, transforming them into a spiritual person who is victorious in their daily walk. We studied Romans 8:1-16 as a gauge for our spiritual walk as we submit completely to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit sets a person free from the law of sin and death. The Holy Spirit dwells within those who walk according to the Spirit by leading

them and teaching them to walk after Him as their guide (John 16:13). The Holy Spirit comes into the willing and obedient vessel as the divine power to put to death the deeds of the body, and the Holy Spirit dwelling in each believer bears a definite, heavenly, living witness that they are a son of God. Lastly, we considered what the manifestation of being filled in Spirit would look like in our daily lives. The spiritual, universal, standard God gives is: **“The fruit of the Spirit is love.”** (Galatians 5:22) If the Holy Spirit comes and fills a person, that person will live a life full of love amid all difficulties, trials, and temptations. Love is the proof of a spiritual person.

What is the Hindrance to the Spirit?

Now comes the necessary question: Since the Holy Spirit has set me free from the law of sin and death; and since the Holy Spirit puts to death the deeds of the body, why do I personally lack the manifestation of the life of Christ? If love is the fruit of the Holy Spirit and I have the Holy Spirit imparted into me through regeneration, why am I so short of a life of perfect love (1 John 4:12-13)? It seems that so few live a life of love, a life full of the Spirit of God, in their daily lives. There must be some terrible hindrance. There is. The hindrance is just self. The life of God, the life of Christ, and the life of the Holy Spirit are all waiting to come into us to possess us, to dwell in us practically, and to transform our life. Christians erroneously think that when they received the Lord Jesus, they automatically got transformed and conformed into His image. Not so. There is a required condition: you must lose your own life. We must allow the Spirit to crucify the old man and old life daily and even moment by moment (Galatians 2:20). We must willingly, voluntarily, and absolutely allow the Spirit to work in us so we give up our self-life. Then, we can walk in newness of God’s life (Romans 6:3-5). However, if you allow self to continue living, even partially, it hinders the operation of the Holy Spirit. Remember, that it is very possible to have the Holy Spirit in you as a child of God, but you prevent Him from doing His work of power in you.

A Manifestation of the Fallen Self in Peter’s Life

Matthew 16:24 gives the remedy against the self: **“Then, Jesus said to His disciples, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.”** The Lord’s words are clear, telling us what we must do to follow Him. We must deny the self. Any person who desires to follow the Lord as His disciple must deny himself, he must take up his cross, and follow Christ practically. We must understand that by nature, we all follow self. There are no exceptions. Living out the self-life is actually natural to each one of us. It is our “default mode,” meaning that if we are passive, we automatically live out self. To follow Christ requires us to be active, diligent, sober, always alert, and always seeking Christ in the Spirit. Christ says that we must give up self, we must forever give up listening to self, and actively listen and obey Christ alone, rejecting all other “voices” (flesh, self, natural mind, world, Satan). We allow Christ to replace the self by giving up the life of self and taking Christ to be our life. This is not automatic, but requires a constant, vigilant and active role on our part to cooperate with the Spirit’s work in us.

Matthew 16 depicts the Lord with His disciples in Caesarea Philippi, asking, “**Who do men say that the son of man is?**” (16:13-15) They gave Him various answers based on what men were speaking. Then, the Lord asked them directly, “**But you, who do you say that I am?**” Peter boldly answered for the rest, “**You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.**” The Lord’s response to Peter is enlightening and establishes the essence and nature of our walk in the Spirit. Christ said, “**Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but My Father Who is in the heavens**” (16:16-17). The disciples did not learn such a truth in catechism class, nor did their mothers teach them, but God the Father reveals this truth to His believers by His Holy Spirit. Revelation means that God has broken through our natural, soulish disposition to unveil Himself to us. It is the start of something brand new. Paul spoke something similar in Galatians 1:15-16, “**But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I did not confer with flesh and blood.**” Paul’s entire life changed when God revealed Jesus Christ to him on the road to Damascus (Acts 9). Revelation from God, speaking from God, is the initiation of all spiritual life and growth.

Weren’t the disciples with Christ for quite some time before He asked them Who He was? Didn’t Christ tell them Who He was prior to this? He surely lived as the Son of God. The disciples observed firsthand the God of the universe in the flesh, teaching, working miracles, loving people and submitting to His Heavenly Father. Yet, here the disciples experienced a revelation from the Father Himself. Now they understood that God Himself was teaching them to know Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God. This was not a doctrine, a theology, or a good conversation piece, but a life changing understanding of who Jesus is as revealed by a living Person, God! This revelation is the foundation of their salvation and their life and work in Christ.

Christ went on to say two more wonderful things to Peter: “**Upon this rock will I build my church ... [and] I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven**” (16:18-19). These are also astounding revelations that align the disciples according to heavenly thinking and existence. But that is not our burden, here. Let’s focus on Peter and how he was literally brought into the heavens while standing in Caesarea Philippi. Peter was given some great spiritual lessons. So far, all seems heavenly and divine. Where is the self?

Christ continued further by sharing what would happen to Him in the near future. He begins to tell them that He would suffer many things from the religious leaders and be killed and on the third day be raised (16:21). Peter immediately took the Lord aside and began to rebuke Him. Peter rebuked the Creator of the universe, the Son of God! He even invoked the Lord’s name in vain, and contradicted what Jesus had just spoken: “**God be merciful to You, Lord. This shall by no means happen to You!**” (16:22) Christ turned to Peter and said, “**Get behind me, Satan. You are a stumbling block to me, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of men**” (16:23). What a contrast! One moment, Peter has revelation from the living Father. The next, he was called Satan, God’s enemy! Peter’s actions and words were straight out of hell, proving that he was taught by Satan in his daily life. The same man who had just uttered words that the living God had taught him began to say things that the Devil had taught him. Peter should have laid hold of the revelation that Jesus was the Christ, the son of the living God, and allow that to deny his own thinking,

but instead he held onto his own soul life. What an important contrast for us to understand as it relates to any follower of Jesus who is not satisfied in Christ alone. We can have the Spirit of God, but we must be wary of and deal with the Devil, also. Satan has much influence on our self-life. In Genesis 4:7 God told Cain that “**Sin is crouching at your door ... and you must rule over it.**” Satan crouches at our self-life, waiting to pounce, like a roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8).

Christ continued His teaching in Matthew 16:24 following His speaking about His own cross and His own death, “**If any man will come after me, let him take up his cross.**” He was telling Peter and all His disciples that He took the lead to go to the cross and die, but they must also go to the cross and die. Just as Christ must be crucified, all the Lord’s true followers must also take up their cross and be crucified in their daily life. This thought was simply not in Peter’s mind. Firstly, he could not accept that Christ needed to be crucified so he took the lead to pull the Lord aside and rebuke Him. After that, how could he possibly understand his own need to be crucified? He was blind to spiritual truth, but the Lord loved him and spoke revelation to him. There is a great lack in the church related to the truth of salvation. Very few grasp the truth, the revelation, that “**If a man wants to be My disciple, he must deny himself, and must take up his cross, and he must follow Me.**”

Without Recognizing & Denying Self We Remain Immature

What a wake-up call for Peter! Peter was floating in the heavens, touching the highest life and rejoicing in being called a blessed man for knowing that Jesus was, in fact, the Son of the living God. Then, he gets called "Satan" by the very One who just blessed him! Peter’s head must have been spinning and his heart confused to the uttermost. What happened? It is actually quite simple from a spiritual perspective. Peter had many thoughts and concepts not surrendered to the teaching of God and the Holy Spirit. Peter knew a great deal about Christ and his kingdom of glory based on prior knowledge, His Jewish background, and based on Christ’s previous teachings. However, he knew nothing about Christ’s crucifixion nor did he believe in His crucifixion. And Peter’s knowledge puffed him up to the point that he felt self-confident enough to rebuke the Lord! How relevant to us today! Paul warns us about being satisfied with our own knowledge (1 Corinthians 8:1). There are so many Christians who believe in a thousand wonderful and beautiful things about Christ, but they do not believe the most important thing of all: that they must take up their cross and be crucified with Jesus (Galatians 2:20; Romans 6:3-5) in order to truly follow Him. Without this process of crucifixion being applied to our self-life, we cannot be filled in the Spirit, and we cannot become the loving person God intends. Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 10:5c that we must **take captive every thought unto the obedience of Christ**. Unfortunately, Christians fall far short of this process, leaving many thoughts unchecked by the Spirit, and therefore, remain carnal, fleshly, in their spiritual lives.

Jesus was so skillful and full of purpose in His teaching. He asked a question that led to a most wonderful revelation from the Father, but He did not stop there and revel in the moment of enlightenment in which His disciples finally understood that He was the Son of God for real! He immediately gave the reason for asking such a question: the self hinders us from understanding, obtaining, and

attaining God, the Spirit, and Christ to the extent that God desires for each of us. The self-life blocks us from enjoying Christ and prompts us to deny Him. Lastly, Christ equipped His disciples by teaching them how to get rid of this enemy of God.

Four Questions About the Self

1. Where does the self originate, this self that has to be denied and crucified?
2. What are the works of the self? How is it manifested in our lives?
3. How can the self be conquered?
4. What is Our View Related to the Self?

1. Where does the self originate, this self that has to be denied and crucified?

First, what did Christ mean when He told His disciples to deny the self? Peter quickly denied Jesus instead of denying self. He would also deny the Lord at the time of His crucifixion (Luke 22:55-62). When Christ was being led before Caiaphas, three times Peter said, “**I do not know the man. I have nothing to do with Him.**” And he even swore with an oath! Peter was clearly told by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 16 that he must deny the self, his own life, his own will, his own desires, and his own identity. Yet, he rebuked the Lord and as a result was called "Satan". Not long after, he completely dissociated himself from the Lord Jesus. Where did such a self-life originate? Didn't God create the self within all of us? Of course, He did.

Every man and angel possess a God-created self that comes from God's hands, meaning that God gave each of us a self-determining power by which we can choose what we want to do with ourselves, how we want to think and feel, and what motives and intentions drive our lives. We are all given free will to have feelings, intentions, motives, and self-will. God's design in creation was that we would choose to love Him and obey Him with our self-choice. But sin ruined God's design temporarily until Jesus Christ came to rectify it.

Satan's Fall

Prior to creation, the throne of God was surrounded by bright spirits, all pure and perfect. One of the brightest of these pure spirits, Lucifer, began to look at himself with awe and wonder because of the beauty and glory given to him by God. He admired himself to the extent that pride came into his heart and he began to say, “**I am as God.**” (Isaiah 14:12-15; Ezekiel 28:1-19). He turned his

desire from God to self to the point that he challenged God's authority. He lifted himself up declaring that he no longer needed to subject himself to God: **"I, the morning star, the prince of light, am I not the chief among the powers of heaven?"** Lucifer, now Satan (meaning adversary), turned away from God to self, pride entered his heart, he fell out of light into darkness, and was changed from an angel of light into a devil, from the brightness of heaven into the blackness and outer darkness of everlasting hell. Pride is the ultimate expression of the untamed self. Instead of turning to God in submission, Satan turned to himself and his own will. Thus, he fell.

Man's Fall: The God-created Self to the Fallen Self

God's salvation restores all His original plan for creation. He created man so that in man His Own Son, Jesus Christ, might manifest (live out) His glory in perfect holiness, righteousness, and love. God's intention in giving man a free will, a God-created self, was to allow man in his self-life to choose to submit to God by always turning the self to God. Then, and only then, can a person stand in the light. By hearing and obeying God continually, by doing His will rather than our own, God promises to fill us with His divine life and blessing forever. However, the Devil came to influence man and to destroy man (John 10:10). Satan hates mankind because he knows that God desires man to reign as kings in the world (Revelation 5:10), making him the footstool of Christ (Hebrews 1:13). Satan's strategies include lying, stealing, and killing (John 10:10). He is a liar (John 8:44) who deceived Adam and Eve, **"If you eat of that fruit, you will be like God."** But Satan's deception had far more lethal consequences because he breathed into them his own hellish pride. He enticed Eve, **"You can be like God, go and eat of that tree."** When, Eve and then Adam chose to follow Satan rather than God, the very poison of hell entered into their nature, and the former God-created self became a fallen self that lifted itself against God and turned away from Him.

We all are born of Adam and Eve, and therefore, we inherit this fallen self that exalts itself against God (Romans 5:12-21). None of us can possibly know what an unredeemable, evil nature we have within us. But we surely can recognize the symptoms of such a monster within us. This evil nature exalts itself against God and over our fellowmen. The entire history of the human race is flooded with but one great struggle: man against man, each trying to exalt himself higher than the other. One wants more power, another more learning, another more culture, another more pleasure, another more social grace ... than anyone else around. Fallen self is the god that rules the world. There is not one exception (Romans 3:9-18). If we truly understood how evil this fallen self within us is, we would continually cry to God for deliverance. Instead, we remain in the self as seen in our fruit: we provoke and devour one another (Galatians 5:15, 26), and we promote or allow strife, envy, jealousy, hatred, bitterness, and malice among our fellow man (Galatians 5:17-20; James 4:1-10; Ephesians 4:31; 1 Peter 2:1; Hebrews 12:15-16).

Deceived, Ignorant, Poisoned

Imagine a deadly, poisonous snake winding its way towards someone we love. We would not hesitate to scream, “Watch out for that dangerous creature!” We would most likely even proclaim, “Kill that beast and deliver us all from its deadly venom!” Yet, when it comes to Satan and our fallen self-life, we are blind, ignorant, foolish, and even defiant to run directly into danger. The story is told of a little child in South Africa who was playing on the floor. A beautifully colored but poisonous snake came into the room and slithered towards the little infant to strike its deadly blow. The child was absolutely attracted to the colorful demon and welcomed its approach. Just prior to striking, a servant girl rushed in and brought the child to safety. Just as that little child welcomed the beautifully colored snake, so we also welcome the fallen self within us, despite its deadly, poisonous nature. Satan’s hellish nature gets us to defend ourselves as we cherish and nourish it. The more we indulge the self-life, the stronger the devil’s influence within us becomes, and the poison spreads throughout our entire being.

Can we apprehend and truly appreciate why Christ calls us to utterly deny the self? The Lord commands us to deny the self and put it to death on the cross ... without excuse, without sympathy, without hesitation, and without remorse. To deny the self means that we are willing to have nothing to do with our own desires, our own intentions, our own will, and our own identity apart from Christ. Christ says that we must take up a cross and nail the self to that cross if we desire to follow Him. To ask why, to hesitate, to challenge, or to reject this command in any way proves that we do not perceive nor understand the satanic origin of self, which represents a horrible rebellion against God. Self originates from hell and drags us back to hell.

2. What are the works of the self? How is it manifested in our lives?

There are chiefly three works of the fallen self: self-will, self-confidence, and self-exaltation (pride). If we soberly look at ourselves in God’s spiritual mirror, we will easily see all three elements of the self (James 1:19-25).

Self-Will

First, let us look at self-will. God created me with a will, and there is nothing in man more noble than a will. The will is God’s great power by which we choose to serve Him. Some Christians deny that we have a free will to choose God, but rather insist that God is sovereign and we have no choice in anything. Yet, those same Christians feel quite free to live their own life apart from God’s plan, deceived by the nature of their fallen self. Whenever people speak or teach, we should quickly look at their daily life for validation. Truth must be manifested by our living and conduct. Other Christians speak about breaking someone’s will especially when someone has a strong will. God desires us to have the strongest will possible as long as it chooses to yield to God in everything all the time. However, when our fallen will does not surrender to God throughout every day, then, the Devil has

power to influence and lead us to sin against God in our thoughts, in our intentions, and in our actions or deeds. Self-will rules in the life of every natural person and every unregenerate person. Self-will says, “I do what I like and I have a right to do what I like.” In today’s society, we call this entitlement.

Conditional Salvation

Christians were not nurtured properly in Christ. For instance, do we all understand that when we became a Christian it was on the condition that we promise never to seek our own will? If we are honest, we would admit that we did not understand this nor did we sign up for such a commitment. But that is just what Christ demands in Matthew 16:24-25. To follow Christ means that we are allowed to do nothing of our own will, nothing of our own choosing or our own wants, but only what God wills. As sons of God, we choose to give up our will. We choose to have no say in our life and we choose to deny all personal rights because we willingly, voluntarily, and wholeheartedly relinquished them to Christ at regeneration and baptism. Remember that our baptism represented death and burial to self (Romans 6:1-5; Galatians 3:27-28). The former fallen self is dead and buried and we need to reckon it dead and buried as we live every day (Romans 6:11).

The whole secret of salvation is the giving up of our will, our self, to God. This will produce the salvation of our soul (1 Peter 1:9), but without denying the self and taking the cross, we will come up short in terms of salvation (1 Corinthians 3:12-15). God’s will is the manifestation of what is in His heart, and we are to submit our will, like an empty cup, to His, saying, “Lord, fill my will with Your will.” Only then can we live a blessed life that is well-pleasing to God (Romans 12:1-3). Christians often try to do the will of God in “important” things, but feel impotent and helpless in the little things in which our self-will does not yield. Consider Luke 16:10. For instance, how we live before our spouse and children speaks volumes as to whether we live according to self-will or God’s will. Would our spouse, children, relatives, neighbors, and coworkers confirm that we are a person entirely surrendered to the will of God in every detail of our lives? We must recognize, accept, and agree that the fallen self is the cause of all our sin against God.

Self-Trust, Self-Confidence, Self-Pleasing

Self-trust or self-confidence is another of the works of self. The whole life and nature of any person is to trust oneself in order to please oneself. Self-trust and self-pleasing is the principle of self-existence. All men seek to please themselves based on trusting themselves. No one lives to please someone other than themselves. Even those who claim to do so have self-indulgent motives. And Christians are not exempt from this principle just because they received Christ into their hearts. Most of the time He is imprisoned within them, not allowed to make His home in our hearts (Ephesians 3:16-17a). Christians seek far more to please themselves than to please God, and this explains why the self becomes stronger and stronger rather than decreases over time as we

continue to walk with God (John 3:30). The strong self explains the lack of love among believers for one another and the continual slavery to certain sins and vices. Hebrews 12:1 calls these “besetting sins” or encumbrances or sins that entangle us because we never seem to be free of them. Christians are defeated from the beginning of their walk with Christ, yet think they are victorious because they trust the self. How sad! How damaging to the building up of the Body of Christ!

An example of self-confidence is again observed with Peter. Jesus partook of His last supper with His disciples and then went out to the mount of Olives and sang a song. He then told His disciples, “**All of you will be offended because of Me tonight: for it is written, I will smite the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered abroad. But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee.**” (Matthew 26:18-32) Peter boldly retorted in full self-assurance, self-confidence, and self-pleasing, “**Even if everyone else is offended because of You, Lord, I will never be offended!**” (26:33) Peter hadn’t listened or allowed the Lord’s words to penetrate his thinking. He certainly did not take captive his thoughts unto the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5c). He spoke immediately and without hesitation; both actions are symptoms of a strong self-life that is unyielding to Christ. Jesus told Peter, “**Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.**” At this point, we all frown at and look down on Peter, thinking that he really blew it. Yes, he did, but don’t think you are any different. We, like him, are full of self-confidence, missing the revelation presented here. The Word of God is written for our enlightenment, not for us to judge others. Do we realize that we would respond to the Lord in exactly the same way? These things are written as an example to us (1 Corinthians 10:11). Peter again responds out of his self-confidence and pride, “**Even if everyone forsakes You, Lord, I will never leave You or deny You!**” (26:35) Yet, soon after this proclamation Peter blatantly denied Christ and did so with an oath (26:57-75).

Where did Peter’s self originate from? Simply from self-confidence, from a person trying to please himself, and not God. Peter did not believe that he would deny His Lord. He truly believed that he would be willing to die on behalf of Christ. He told the Lord on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias, “**You know, Lord, that I love You.**” (John 21:15) Previously, Peter spoke to the Lord, “**We have left everything to follow You, what will there be for us?**” (Matthew 19:26-27) He was full of self-confidence, trusting in himself. Peter may have left outward things such as a career, his relatives and countrymen, and his former lifestyle. However, he had not left the self behind when he followed Jesus on the earth for three and a half years. The Lord was exposing the most damaging enemy that lived inside of Peter: the strong, self-confident person. This self-trusting, self-pleasing person, could not possibly follow Jesus according to God’s will.

Why the Constant Failure to Live Christ?

Why is it so frequent that Christians and even many atheists speak of a time in their lives when God was real to them and that they may have enjoyed serving Jesus, but they no longer sense Him as real nor follow Him?” The answer is always the same: they

trusted self. These people may even refute this and say, “No, I certainly did not trust myself. On the contrary, I felt that I was a poor, feeble creature and could do nothing.” They have deceived themselves by a lie of the enemy just as Eve was deceived in Eden by Satan. If anyone trusts Christ, he experiences victory over self and sin because the Lord promises never to give us up and to never leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). Those who trust in self, trust in their own earnestness, in their own integrity, in their own abilities, or in something of themselves. But when the adversity comes, when the difficulties and hardships beat against them, the self cannot cope and denies God, even blaming God for the trouble (Matthew 7:24-27; 13:19-22).

Why do so many Christians admit that they cannot live the life that God wants them to live, yet, are unwilling to take the appropriate steps to change? Here is the simple reason: they still trust self. They still trust in their own ability and effort to gain the victory. They have not given up self to death and burial in order to trust in God alone. On the contrary, when we trust Christ we will not fall. Rather, God will have mercy upon us and deliver us from self. We need to thank the Lord for the example of Peter and how much he is exposed in the gospels and Acts. Peter’s example is for all of us to see who we really are: self-confident people. Paul warned all God’s children in 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 stating that all the things that occurred when Israel left Egypt and wandered in the wilderness happened as examples for us, and as a warning that we will not think we can stand in ourselves (self-confidence). God will not tempt us beyond our ability when we have surrendered our will to His and have no confidence in the self (Philippians 3:3), but He will allow us to be tempted and even defeated when we are self-confident. Peter and the Israelites’ lives prove this. The reason so many Christians fall into sin is due to self-confidence. “Lord, expose my self-confidence as you did Peter’s and the children of Israel. Deliver me from looking to myself rather than looking away to You.” (Hebrews 12:2)

Self-Exaltation

The third manifestation of the fallen self is self-exaltation or fleshly pride. Jesus said, “**How can you believe, who take honor one from another.**” (John 5:44) I am speaking directly to believers in Christ now, not people of the world. Certainly, we can see how all the wretched history of the world is due to pride. Wars, fornication and adultery, and all the fruit of the flesh (Galatians 5:17-20) arise out of pride. But now I am speaking to genuine believers in Christ. How can we be so “touchy” or over-sensitive when people do not render us the honor that we think we deserve? We are jealous when the boss recognizes someone else above us especially if we did the same amount of work. We are embarrassed when asked to take a lower place than we may have expected in a meeting, for a job, in our homes, and in our daily lives. James pointed out that it is common for wars and fighting to exist among believers. He said that lust, jealousy, adultery, and murder exist among God’s people, and that it is common that God’s people love the world, meaning they are at enmity with God (James 4:1-5). Then, James gives the reason: pride (4:6-10). Pride is a form of self-exaltation.

Can we be honest and admit that we exalt ourselves all the time? “That was clever of me.” “It’s fortunate that I was there and said something.” “I knew how to manage that situation well.” “I made a beautiful prayer.” “Did you see how I had the anointing?” “Everyone followed my lead.” “If it hadn’t been for me ... (you finish the line).” Too often these kinds of things are allowed and accepted. This is especially true of Christian leaders who allow unchecked self-exaltation all the time. They even tell others to repeat whatever they say because it is the best. Yet, is the fruit of their lives love, kindness, gentleness, meekness, and long-suffering? Do they consider others more excellent than themselves (Philippians 2:3)? Often, you observe irritability, unrestricted forthrightness (meanness), outbursts of anger, and lack of patience. Why do we tolerate the exaltation of self even in the presence of God? It is because we exalt ourselves so often that we tolerate self-exaltation in those we choose to honor.

Pride Fills Our Fallen Nature

Pride is insidious and subtle to the point that we easily forget that pride has poisoned our entire being. A person can be proud in the smallest matters. For instance, Christians pride themselves in their hair, in their finger and toenails, in their body features, in the way they walk or talk, in the way they keep their house, in their career, in their performance, in the car they drive and how they drive it, in the clothes they wear, or in the amount of money they earn. There is nothing on earth that a person cannot be proud about because pride fills our entire nature. Unless nailed to the cross, every person, including believers, will exalt themselves due to pride. Children fight over who has the biggest ice cream cone or a child will forcefully take another child’s toy without provocation. The Devil so easily beguiles us and he has trained us from infancy to love and exalt the self. We will never grow spiritually mature without a full reckoning of this accursed self from hell, which is the root of pride and self-exaltation.

We always seek our own honor and consider ourselves above others. So, God in His word tells us to consider others more excellent than ourselves and to regard the virtues of others, not just our own (Philippians 2:3-4). This is to deny the self. God told us more than once that He resists the proud (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5). Do we ever realize why we have so much strife and lack of peace or harmony among our family, neighbors and fellow believers? It is because we are proud and unwilling to surrender our pride! We are unwilling to be wronged (1 Corinthians 6:7-8). The self has corrupted everything we say and do and the fruit is as obvious as the nose on our face ... but we ignore it: fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, enmity, strife, gossip, rumors, slander, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, divisions, sects, envy, excesses, sarcasm, borderline or improper joking, bullying, laughing at others’ expense, licentiousness (lack of restriction), speaking some truth without any love or intent to build the other person up, and so forth (Galatians 5:19-20). We can be so unkind in the name of love. We can be so stubborn in the guise of cooperation. Do you have sweet harmony with your spouse, children, neighbors, relatives, coworkers, saints, and even your enemies as much as is possible (Romans 12:18)? Our very nature is proud and we can be nothing else. Therefore, Christ tells us to deny self.

Hopefully, your heart is beginning to cry, “How can I get free from self and sin?”

3. How can the self be conquered?

Christ tells us: “**Let a man deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.**” (Matthew 16:24) He asserts three phrases that mirror Ephesians 4:20-24 and Colossians 3:8-16, stating that we must put off the old man, be renewed in our minds, and put on the new man.

Let a Man Deny Himself

The first is, “**Let him deny himself.**” This means that we all should say, “I have nothing to do with self. I will not listen to it. I will surrender it to the Spirit.” Peter did not deny himself, but rather asserted himself when he denied Christ: “**I do not know the man! I do not want to be associated with Christ or have anything to do with Him.**” Peter, like us, needed to deny the self and say, “I have nothing to do with self.” From this perspective, we must acknowledge who we are apart from Christ, an individual self, and we must be willing to allow Christ to set our self aside.

1 Corinthians 15:45-47 shows that in our daily living, our first reaction to anything is soulish, of the first man Adam, which represents our self-life. The spiritual response in our life only comes as we deny this first soulish reaction. Christ can only be organically manifested in our lives when we deny the self first. This is a rule that we need to follow throughout our daily living (Philippians 3: 16).

Take Up Your Cross

Then Christ says, “**Take up the cross.**” The cross always means death. Christ did not explain what He meant by take up your cross. He did not expound nor teach that the cross meant death to self. He knew that the disciples could not understand His words. So, He demonstrated His words with action. He told them a few moments earlier that He was to be killed and buried (16:21). Therefore, He was giving a living example of His words. Christ demonstrated that just as He had to give up His life and be crucified, so also, His disciples must be crucified spiritually. The Lord Jesus’ life on earth demonstrated and manifested a crucified life. He did not insist on being God, but rather humbled Himself and became obedient unto death (Philippians 2:5-8). Paul used this same approach in Galatians 2:20, “**I am crucified with Christ, yet it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.**” Paul wrote most of the New Testament and it would be easy to assume he emphasized teaching, doctrine, and theology, yet on the contrary, Paul emphasized the manifestation of the truth (2 Corinthians 4:2), meaning that our words are always backed up by our life and conduct. Actually, our life produces our conduct. You will know a tree by its fruit (Matthew 7:20). Paul lived a crucified

life. The former Saul was dead and buried, and Paul was a son of God walking in newness of life (Romans 6:3-5). In Philippians 3:4-16 Paul literally forsook all of his prominent past as a “Pharisee of the Pharisees.” He said the principle of his life was to forget what was behind and stretch forward to what is before (3:12-16) in order to be found in Christ not having his own righteousness (3:9), and also to know Christ personally and intimately, and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death (3:10). This is to take the cross. We let all the past die ... even the good things of Christ we count as loss in order to walk in newness of life.

There are many verses that tell us to apply the cross to our daily living: Ephesians 4: 31, Romans 8:13, Colossians 3:5, 8, 1 Peter 2:1, to name a few. Taking up our cross means that we are applying Christ's crucifixion to our flesh, to our old man, to our former manner of life. Paul wrote, "If we walk by the Spirit, we should by no means fulfill the lusts of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16), and "Those who are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and lusts" (5:24). one of the key aspects of walking in the Spirit is to crucify the flesh, the old man, the self. Only then can we fully enter into the process of renewing the mind in order to put on Christ, where God's Divine attributes become assimilated into our human virtues.

Follow Me

The Lord's statement to the disciples on how to follow Him was: “**And follow Me.**” Oh, what a blessed phrase! Jesus was the pattern, the model, the prototype of the divine life lived out on earth (Romans 8:29; 1 Peter 2:21) and He said to follow Him rather than follow the self. This shows that we have a choice and we must decide. If we are passive, our former life decides for us: we follow self, which is influenced and filled with Satan's hellish nature. Peter said that we were redeemed from the “**former vain manner of life handed down from our fathers**” (1:19). The former vain manner of life handed down by our father is the self. It is literally genetic! Therefore, we must actively make a choice every day and every moment: will I follow self or follow Jesus? Will I seek to please self or please Jesus? Am I willing to deny self or will I inadvertently or intentionally deny Jesus? Remember that solemn lesson of Peter. He refused to deny self and rather chose his self-confidence. What was the outcome? He denied Jesus. If you do not quickly and utterly deny self, you will deny Jesus in every matter and every day. This is the same as Peter's denial and the fruit is ugly: “I do not know the man! I do not want to be associated with Him. I have nothing to do with Jesus! I desire to please myself!”

Christians are always creating schemes, outward strategies, and methods to follow Christ that avoid or ignore the Lord's unique and only solution to the self: “**Let a man deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.**” One example of this is WWJD, “What Would Jesus Do?” It sounds good at a glance, but where does the denial of the self and the taking up of our cross come in? We cannot follow Jesus in ourselves. We cannot change ourselves. Most Christians spend their whole lives on earth in vain because that is exactly what they try to do: follow Christ by their own self-effort, and try to change themselves. The only way

WWJD works is if we realize that Jesus denied Himself (as God) to become a man in the likeness of the flesh (Philippians 2:5-8). He allowed His creatures to crucify Him on the cross. And He always followed His Father (John 12:49; 9:4). We need to deny ourselves and take Christ as our new man (Ephesians 4:22-24). We need to continually allow the Spirit to put us on the cross in everything we think, say, and do. And we must always follow our precious Savior and Lord with thanksgiving.

Jesse Penn Lewis served the Lord from the time she was a teenager. She was often overwhelmed with health problems and as a young woman serving Christ in the early 1900's, she was not allowed to minister in public, although a gifted speaker among girls and women. After a dozen years of serving the Lord, she realized that her life in Christ was characterized by the same entangling sins, the same inability to truly know the Lord, and a continual lack of joy. She laid aside her service for almost two years to focus on prayer and petition, asking the Lord for His light. It came. The Lord told Jesse that all of her previous service to Him, although out of good intentions and full of consecration, was as "filthy rags" in His presence (Isaiah 64:6). All she had accomplished was out of her self-life. From that day forward, Jesse Penn Lewis began a life of repentance, confession, surrender, and dependence before the Lord. She was used by the Lord internationally and many were able to follow her example of denying the self, taking up the cross, and following Jesus.

To follow Christ is the equivalent of putting on the new man based on the renewing of the mind (Ephesians 4:23-24; Colossians 3:10-11). The major reason we must deny the old man, deny the self, is because our thinking, our mind, our knowledge base, has been polluted, leavened, negatively influenced and steered by the fallen nature and by a soul that does not follow God. So. Paul told us that though the outer man is decaying, our inward man is being renewed day by day (2 Corinthians 4:16). This renewal includes the renewing of our mind, which allows transformation (Romans 12:2). Transformation is the process of putting on Christ which includes all the marvelous attributes of God (Colossians 3: 12-17; Galatians 5: 22-23; 1 Corinthians 13, 2 Peter 1: 5-7, etc.).

Life Lessons on How to Deny the Self

Are we beginning to understand what a blessed thing it is to deny self and to follow Jesus? Jesus is our Leader and Teacher and His lessons are lessons of life. We like to hear the outward teachings, but Jesus always points to the life operation within us. Life produces our living so if we live in Christ, we will behave like Christ. We cannot copy Christ's outward behavior, but His life operating within us can produce such conduct. Let's consider Peter again. The Lord took Peter to that very place where he denied Him three times in order that Peter might learn to know himself thoroughly. He took Peter to pray with Him in Gethsemane to show him that his own self effort to pray could not last for even one hour (Matthew 26:40). Peter stood at a distance when Jesus hung alone on the cross to show him how little he could suffer with Him (Luke 23:49). After the Lord's death and resurrection Jesus appeared to His disciples who were in hiding and breathed the Holy Spirit into them (John 20:19-22). The self was in fear. Shortly after, John 21 shows Jesus appearing to those who had gone fishing with Peter, those who were in despair and unbelief.

Again, the self-life shrank back to their former manner of life. On the shore of the Sea of Tiberias Jesus caused them to catch such an abundance of fish that the boats were sinking. Yet none of them dared to ask if it was Jesus. How many times do we need to see the self deny Jesus to believe that we will always deny Him in our self-life? Peter was the first to realize that it was Jesus on the shore and he dove in the water from his boat to cover his nakedness. The self-life is crude and immodest. Ironically, this was the third time Jesus had appeared to His disciples and He asked Peter three times if he loved Him. No doubt the Lord was showing Peter that his self-life only has the capacity to deny Christ, but that in the Spirit he can deny the self and follow Christ by feeding His sheep.

We have put Peter on the chopping block for our enlightenment. If we look to the end of Peter's life, we will see that he did follow Jesus, although with many failures, but he learned to deny himself, to take up his cross, and to follow His Lovely Lord Jesus. He died as a martyr (John 21:18-19). It is commonly accepted church tradition that Peter was crucified upside down. Peter supposedly denied the right to be crucified as His Precious Lord had been (right side up).

In Acts 1 we see the resurrected Christ appearing to His disciples to train them that He was always with them as the Holy Spirit. One example was recorded in Luke 24:13-35 about two disciples on the road to Emmaus. They were clueless that Jesus Himself was walking with them as they moaned over the horrific events in Jerusalem, but they did eventually acknowledge an inner "burning in their hearts." This was the Lord as the Spirit dwelling in them. When the Lord appeared to those gathered in Jerusalem, He told them to wait for the Father's promise. They responded by asking if Israel would finally be restored (1:6). The self just doesn't get it! Jesus told them of the power of the Holy Spirit that would come upon them so they would be His living witnesses (martyrs) throughout the earth (1:8). The Father's promise was the presence of Jesus as the Holy Spirit. But what does the self do? The self looks at the power and outward works we can do. They wanted to see God destroy Rome and establish Israel as a nation again. Instead, the Lord called them His witnesses, His martyrs, meaning they would be in a constant state of denying the self, taking up their cross, and following Him.

How can the seemingly never-ending reign of self end? How can we be delivered from this insidious, natural, secret power that constitutes us and is deeply rooted in our being? Christ says, "**Deny self, take up your cross, and follow Me.**" The entire New Testament contains this same message, but we miss it or ignore it. Paul wrote in Philippians 3:10 that He wanted to know Christ. Any genuine believer has this same aspiration: to know Christ. But Paul's knowledge of Christ was not some outward teaching, doctrine, or practice. It was a living Person who had denied Himself, gone to the cross, and absolutely followed God the Father. So, Paul wrote, "**To know Christ, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His suffering, being conformed to His death.**" If we want to know Christ and have the excellency of the knowledge of Christ (Philippians 3:7-8), we must pass through death and burial, in order to experience the power of resurrection. Resurrection follows death. The fellowship of His suffering includes a life of self-denial in order to hear and obey the Father (follow Him).

Following Jesus is an active commitment, a deliberate act that requires soberness, diligence, vigilance, and assertion. Passivity succumbs to the self. Ignorance succumbs to the self. Self begets self (John 3:6). If we do not actively pursue Christ (Philippians 3:12-14), we are like the person that had an unclean spirit cast out (the self), but we did not replace that self with Christ. Satan, as the stronger man attacks and overpowers us, taking away our defenses and plundering our spiritual house (Luke 11:21-25). The self is no match for Satan. Only Christ is more powerful (1 John 4:4). If we follow Christ, we will be safe from the enemies' attacks because Christ is our life, our power, our joy, our everything. Notice in Luke 11 that the house was cleansed and furnished, but empty. In other words, the person did not actively pursue Christ to be filled in the Spirit. After a time, the evil spirit along with seven others came in and dwelt there. Do we get the message the Lord is unveiling here? It is not enough to deny the self, we must follow Christ. Christ, the strongest One, must come in and dwell in us, and it is He that keeps the house (us) in safety.

4. What is Our View Related to the Self?

Hopefully, you have come to grips with the tremendous battle raging within each of us. Galatians 5:17 says it best, the flesh (including self) wars against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh. This is an on-going battle up to the day we are taken to be with the Lord. Firstly, we must assess whether we recognize the self for what it is. Second, are we willing to have the self dealt with? Third, are we willing to not only deny the self, lay down the self, allow the self to be killed and destroyed, but are we willing to follow Jesus?

Denying the Self Involves Our Lifetime

We should not imagine that we can deny the self once and for all and be freed from it. The self is our person; it is a life that we lived by, not an inanimate object that can be thrown away permanently. As long as we exist in the fallen flesh, the self is present and needs to be denied constantly and continually. Matthew 7:24-27 shows that the wise man and the foolish man both built houses, which represent our lives. The wise man built his house, his person, on the rock of listening and obeying the Lord. The foolish man built his house, his self-life, on the sand, meaning he did not practice obedience to the Lord, which is equivalent to not following the Lord. 2 Timothy 2:20 speaks of a great house, which is built with improper, non-spiritual materials. In 1 Corinthians 3:6-17, Paul wrote about the organic building, which can be spiritual (using gold, silver, and precious stones as the building materials) or according to the self (using wood, hay, and straw as the building materials). The Lord does not destroy the house built by the self until the judgment day. This is because the self is a person, it is us.

God enlightens us to recognize the accursedness of self and what self has really been doing all the years of our Christian life. We allowed self to reign in our lives for quite some time so we must expect that the dethroning process and spiritual renovation will

also take time to complete. However, in one step we can take the position of a person who utterly denies self, and gives oneself to be fully possessed by Jesus. This is a necessary step and it can be done right now. It is not a light decision since many will not take such a step because they are ignorant, blind, or unwilling. They are not willing to confess that they have no true insight; that self is the unique cause of their sin, and that they are still slaves to sin even after being regenerated for a period of time. They might even argue that self is not the cause of their sin, but what else can produce all these entangling and besetting sins that have made them unhappy and defeated as a believer? What else allows them to display outbursts of anger, pride, willfulness, worldliness, and self-pleasing even though they know this does not please the Lord? It is nothing but self.

Are you going to confess that your self is the major enemy of God that prevents your full salvation? Can you see the wasted time that this cursed, evil root of self usurped when we could have had a life full of the Holy Spirit, full of Jesus, full of humility, and full of God? Will you confess that you did not know how bad your self-life really was and how it was running your whole Christian life instead of the Spirit ruling you? You may say, “If I could tear self out of my life and kill it, I would.” But you cannot do that. You can, however, do something even better. You can come to the feet of Jesus with a humble and broken heart and agree with Him that the self should be condemned without excuse and without sympathy. Admit that your self-life is an accursed thing that opposes God. Cast the self down at Jesus’ feet and say, “Son of God, I follow You with my whole heart to the uttermost. I desire to follow You even to the very depths of death. I desire to utterly surrender myself to You. And I desire to receive You and follow You at all costs. Fill my whole being with Yourself.”

To the self-satisfied Christian, my speaking is vain. Anyone who thinks or says, “I am an earnest Christian who has consecrated my life to serve God, I am doing my best, I am not what I ought to be; but I do fairly well,” that person will not likely heed my words. But the one who is exposed by the Lord’s light and openly confesses, “I feel sinful, I feel wretched, I cannot live this defeated life any longer, I have denied my Lord Jesus too often already in many ways and at many times, but no longer. I have tried hard to live for the Lord but have failed because I lived according to my self-life and not according to the Spirit. I now see the root of my failure: the self. Now, I believe that the Son of God came into me as a new man to be my life.

Christ will live in you by His Holy Spirit. Paul says, “**It is no longer I but Christ that lives in me.**” (Galatians 2:20) You may not be able to explain it, but just say “Amen” to God’s word. Say it again, “I no longer live according to the self, but Christ lives in me according to the Spirit. It is no longer the old I, the old self, but Christ as the new man that I want to live in me.” May God give us grace to take the step through the Spirit to admit the self, deny the self, put self on the cross, and follow Jesus. Nothing else can give us peace or make us holy.

“Lord Jesus, come in. God shine into my heart and show me what a cursed thing this self has been and still is. Grant me a full salvation.”