

The Way of the Cross, Part 2

“If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” I love that word “if” in this passage. The implication is that I can refuse this path. And indeed we can refuse it. In fact, all of us probably know Christians who have refused the way of the cross. Perhaps we are resisting that call in an area of our lives even now, this moment! After all, this invitation to come and die goes against not only every fiber of our being but the very fiber of the culture around us. How does Jesus’ command to deny myself stand up to the American psychologist’s admonitions to love myself, demand my rights, and nurture my self-esteem? The root meaning of the word “deny” has serious implications in terms of the context of this verse:

- From Strong’s – to deny utterly, disown; to contradict, disavow, reject, refuse.
- From the Dictionary – to refuse to recognize or acknowledge; disavow, disown.

Jesus is here saying that a disciple of His must disown *himself*. One teacher used the picture of a disowned son to further explain it. In Jesus’ day, if a son had walked in blatant disobedience, unwilling to repent, and if this son had repeatedly refused the correction of his parents and had by this behavior disgraced the family, he would have been disowned. If this same son ever came again to the door of his father’s house, his presence would not have been acknowledged. There would be no question in the family’s mind of even opening the door to tell him to go away. It would have been as if that son never been born – he became a non-entity – he had been disavowed, rejected, disowned. That is Jesus’ meaning here when He uses the word ‘deny.’ It’s as if when my ‘self’ comes to me and says thus and so, I do not even acknowledge the thought!

Jesus was talking about a complete rejection of my own thoughts and my own will; it is a decision to refuse any place to my flesh whatsoever. Paul put it this way in 2 Corinthians 10:5: *“We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.”* And so the thought-life is where this dying to self must all begin. The primary venue of death is in my own heart and mind, crucifying my thoughts and my ways by submitting them to the scrutiny of His word, and allowing Him put His thoughts and His ways in their place. *“Be transformed by the renewing of your mind ...”* (Romans 12:2)

I have to agree to God’s way in order to follow Christ. And His way is the way of my death – death to self. Fortunately for all of us, what His word requires His grace provides. In Jesus’ call to die to ourselves is the reminder that we are following in His steps. He didn’t just pave the way for us to go, He walked the very path we could never walk. And now by His Spirit He gives us the grace and the power to do what we could never have done on our own: *“If anyone would come ... follow Me.”*