

## *Women & More*

### ***The 'Self' We Mustn't Trust***

Lesson 5: **October 1, 2015**—*spiritual warfare*

Self, according to Webster's *New American Dictionary*, is defined as 1 : the **essential person distinct from all other persons in identity** 2 : **a particular side of a person's character** 3 : **personal interest : selfishness**. Did we ever wonder if Adam had a 'self' before Eve came along, since there was no need to distinguish himself from another? Other than the last definition of selfishness, 'self' doesn't look too bad—but the jump from **essential person distinct from other persons** to **selfishness** is just a hop connected by personal interest. The essential distinction part of 'self' is God-given, but the 'self'—left-to-itself—will become self-immersed, self-reliant, reject the Giver, and self-destruct.

Have we heard the admonition not to take ourselves too seriously? In Greek mythology there was a beautiful youth named Narcissus who fell in love with his own image, and from that story comes the word narcissism meaning 1 : **undue dwelling on one's own self or attainments** 2 : **love of** or sexual desire for **one's own body**. Woe...that's heavy stuff! These are definitions from the dictionary describing how far self-love can go—in very short order!

When we receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord—allow Him to rule and master—and follow His lead: When we choose to be His disciple, the first thing we need to do is deny 'self'. **Matthew 16:24**, **Mark 8:34** and **Luke 9:23** Jesus says, "*If anyone would come after me, he must **deny himself** and take up his cross and follow me.*" Luke adds the word *daily* after cross, and in **Luke 14:27** gives this warning: "*And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.*" Becoming a disciple won't just happen: It is a choice, and there is a cost.

We are to renounce 'self' (not I; but Christ); to cease to make 'self' the object of our life and actions. God, not self, must be at the center of our life! Those who choose to be Jesus' disciples can only be said to truly follow him when they've made the decision, first, to deny self. Giving up selfish ambition and self-effort, they **let go of the controls** and, further, do not set their will against God's complete control. Then they live each and every day for Christ and his glory and not for themselves. Our self-life must be given up daily in order to gain the 'life' Christ has for us—the exchanged life!

We must make a radical decision to deny ourselves. To deny is the opposite of confess: **we confess (acknowledge) Christ and we deny self**; or we will confess (acknowledge) self and deny Christ! Scripture warns in **Matthew 6:24ab** "*No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.*"

We must 1) confess (acknowledge) Christ, and 2) identify with Him. The Barker-Kohlenberger *Expositor's Bible Commentary* says: To deny self “does not mean cultivating a weak, non-assertive personality or merely denying ourselves certain pleasures; rather, it means we must live for Christ...to take up the cross daily is to live each day **not for ‘self’, but for Christ.**”

Even Christ did not please himself! Romans 15:1-4 “*We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and **not to please ourselves.** 2Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. 3**For even Christ did not please himself** but, as it is written: ‘The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.’ 4For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.*”

Over and over again in sacred Scripture Jesus stated that he came to do the Father's will! Centuries ago, Demosthenes wrote: “Nothing is more easy than to deceive one's self.” Oh the sinful nature of one's own beguiling ‘self’ that begs to be deceived—as was Eve. Satan uses ‘self’ to divert, tempt, attack, and insinuate doubt by deception, division and distraction. Is there a possibility that we will minimize and underestimate the ‘self’ that we mustn't trust? Listen carefully to this magnified and mirrored look at ‘self’ and what selfishness looks like within the Christian lifestyle as described in “The Traits of the Self-life,”—a test—prepared by the Western Tract Mission.

- (1) Are you ever conscious of a secret spirit of pride, an exalted feeling in view of your success or position, because of your good training and appearance, because of your natural gifts and abilities, an important, independent spirit, stiffness and preciseness?
- (2) Are you ever conscious of love of human praise, a secret fondness to be noticed, love of supremacy, drawing attention to self in conversation, a swelling out of self when you have had a free time in speaking or praying?
- (3) Are you ever conscious of the stirrings of anger or impatience which, worst of all, you call nervousness or holy indignation, a touchy, sensitive spirit, a disposition which dislikes being contradicted, a desire to throw sharp, heated words at another?
- (4) Are you ever conscious of self-will, a stubborn, un-teachable spirit, an arguing, talkative spirit, harsh, sarcastic expressions, an unyielding, headstrong disposition, a driving, commanding spirit, a disposition to criticize and pick flaws when set aside and unnoticed, a peevish, fretful spirit, a disposition that loves to be coaxed and humored?

- (5) Are you ever conscious of a jealous disposition, a secret spirit of envy shut up in your heart, an unpleasant sensation in view of the great prosperity and success of another, a disposition to speak of the faults and failings, rather than the gifts and virtues, of those more talented and appreciated than yourself?
- (6) Are you ever conscious of a dishonest, deceitful disposition, the evading and covering of the truth, the covering up of your real faults, the leaving of a better impression of yourself than is strictly true, false humility, exaggeration, straining the truth?
- (7) Are you ever conscious of unbelief, a spirit of discouragement in times of pressure and opposition, lack of quietness and confidence in God, lack of faith and trust in God, a disposition to worry and complain in the midst of pain, poverty or at the dispensations of divine providence, an over-anxious feeling about whether everything will come out alright?
- (8) Are you ever conscious of formality and deadness, lack of concern for lost souls, dryness and indifference, lack of power with God?

**Do not raise a hand, but was there anyone who moved through this list unscathed?** If any one or several of these descriptions are true of us, then we have some of the traits of the self-life ruling. 'Self' will be manifested differently in each—as shown by the test—but 'self's commonality places every one on level ground: We've all sinned; we've all fallen short, and we've all gone our own way, and 'self' was in the middle of it all—we mustn't trust it!

A preacher once said, "The opposite of love is not hate—it is self." And the reference for this statement is: 2 Timothy 3:1-8 (a particularly frightening passage) "*But mark this: **there will be terrible times in the last days.** <sup>2</sup>People will be **lovers of themselves**, lovers of money, **boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy,** <sup>3</sup>**without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control,** brutal, not lovers of the good, <sup>4</sup>**treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.***

<sup>6</sup>"*They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over weak-willed women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires, <sup>7</sup>always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth.*"

In Luke 22:31-32, Peter thought he knew himself, but Jesus knew him better: Jesus knew the 'self' that Simon Peter must not trust. "*Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. <sup>32</sup>But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.*" Charles Spurgeon: "Can the wise man guess by what folly he will next be seduced from his obedience?"

There are two ways to live in life: The selfish way or the **selfless** way. To be selfless, we must give up self-serving: Self-aggrandizing self-love, self-effort, self-absorption and selfish ambition must go. And we must take up the 'self' activity of self-denial and self distrust, remembering that **there are no self-made Christians!** 2 Corinthians 10:18 says, "*For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.*" There is an enemy to our choosing God's will, God's way and God's Word. Our conflict is with 'self'—when it listens to Satan. And to stand against 'self' is spiritual warfare!

► In Luke 11:42-53 Jesus outlines six woes to a Pharisee, and the first two are: 1. To neglect justice and the love of God (v 42), and 2. **To love self exaltation and self-promotion** (v 43). And verse 52—"You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering,"—describes the selfish Pharisee.

Webster defines selfish as: **concerned with one's own welfare excessively or without regard for others.** Inscription on an English tombstone:

Here lies a miser who lived for himself.  
He cared for nothing but gathering wealth.  
Now where he is or how he fares  
Nobody knows and nobody cares.

This is a horrible example of what happens to self-centered people, and illustrates the strangulation of selfishness in the life of a person. A woman to whom W. A. Criswell had gone for a visit was a complaining, bitter, self-centered woman, who refused to receive the gospel and died. The funeral director called Dr. Criswell to see if he would do the service. When Criswell arrived, he found that he was the only other person there, except the corpse. He had a funeral service that no one attended. 1 Peter 5:8 "**Be self-controlled** and alert. *Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*"

God absolutely wants us to exercise self-control—the ability to control our own actions and feelings—and it is given to us by the Holy Spirit. We cannot do it on our own—God knew that! Galatians 5:22-23 "**But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.** *Against such things there is no law.*"

♥ A plain tombstone in the courtyard of St. Paul's Cathedral in London reads:

"Sacred to the memory of General Charles George Gordon,  
who at all times and everywhere gave his strength to the weak,  
his substance to the poor,  
his sympathy to the suffering and his heart to God."

Serving others selflessly was at the heart of what General William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, said just before he died. His mission to the poor of London had spread across the world. His *soldiers* were gathered at an international convention. General Booth was to deliver the main address, but because he became ill, he was unable to come. Those at the convention longed to receive a message from their beloved leader. So from his sickbed, Booth dictated a one-word telegram that would be his last sermon. His final message was this: **“Others!”**

Under the NIV heading, *Making One's Calling and Election Sure*, 2 Peter 1:6-8 says, “For this very reason, **make every effort to add to your faith** goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, **self-control**; and **to self-control, perseverance**; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ”

Paul, in Galatians 2:20, says it all: “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

A pastor of a large church was at a crossroad: Would he fully yield to the Master or would he compromise with ‘self’? After a fierce inner battle he penned the following words:

“Oh the bitter shame and sorrow, that a time could ever be,  
When I let the Savior’s pity plead in vain...  
And proudly answered, all of ‘self’ and none of Thee.

“Yet He found me; I beheld Him bleeding on the cursed tree;  
Heard Him pray, forgive them Father...  
And my wistful heart said faintly, some of ‘self’, and some  
of Thee.

“Day by day his tender mercy healing, helping, full and free,  
Sweet and strong, and oh, so patient, brought me lower...  
While I whispered, less of ‘self’ and more of Thee.

“Higher than the highest heavens, deeper than the deepest sea;  
Lord, Thy love at last has conquered; grant me now my soul’s  
desire...  
“None of ‘self’ and all of Thee!”