

Series:	Reference:	Title:	Date:
Ruin to Renovation	Various Passages	Dying to Self	03.11.18
<b>Website Writeup:</b>			
Dying to self brings full life in Jesus! I'm excited where we are going in this series, you should read, or better yet listen! This stuff is worth it!			

### Color changes in text indicate slide changes

Thanks to Dallas Willard, this series is born out of his book, *Renovation of the Heart*. Many of his thoughts & words make it into these sermons; read the book as you follow along.

We've travelled down paths leading into deep woods of the soul in past weeks. To appreciate the ups, you gotta experience the downs - today we're on our way up! One of the greatest things about humanity is, although we've drifted so far from God, we're capable of being restored. Restoration magnified by the fact we've strayed so far in the first place! The dawn always shines brighter after the darkness clears!

We've heard the Psalmist say we're sinful from birth (Psalm 51). We've heard Jeremiah say our hearts are deceitful & beyond cure (Jeremiah 17:9). Last week we heard John Calvin say, *"The surest source of destruction to men is to obey themselves."*

But neither Scripture, nor Calvin, leave us without hope. Calvin continues to say, *"For as the surest source of destruction to men is to obey themselves, so the only haven of safety is to have no other will, no other wisdom, than to follow the Lord wherever he leads. Let this, then, be the first step, to abandon ourselves, and devote the whole energy of our minds to the service of God."*

What he's referring to, isn't simply a verbal proclamation of dedication from the believer, but a whole hearted life change of allegiance to Christ. One which is seen in Romans 12:1-2, two verses we are going to look at piece by piece for a few moments, *"Therefore, I urge you, brothers & sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy & pleasing to God — this is your true & proper worship."*

This is the non-gnostic view of the body - the biblical worldview - the body as creation of God, part & parcel of our spiritual being, we don't need to kill it off, deny its needs, beat it into submission, or disregard the importance of what we do in our skin, we're called to submit our bodies holistically as living sacrifice in obedience to Christ's will.

*2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world,*

Notice this is in the active voice since it's what we typically do with our minds, we conform them to what society & culture dictates of us which we saw last week - the common worldview with it's beliefs & values which are contrary to the biblical worldview. We meld minds with with the rest, nestling them in the thinking of our contemporaries. And Paul continues...

*...but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test & approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing & perfect will."*

That last bit is in the passive voice, done to you, something else transforming our minds - outside intervention. God's given us that intervention in Word & Spirit & it's through this we understand his will. Notice then...understanding doesn't precede submission, submission precedes understanding. We submit first in trust that God will reveal his reasons & ground our understanding in time.

And also in Ephesians 4:20-24, which we looked at last week, it says the same, *"That, however, is not the way of life you learned 21 when you heard about Christ & were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. 22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness & holiness."*

Verse 24 reminds us, we have a part to play, we actively, as in Romans 12:1-2, put ourselves in the receiving position of taking in the life of God. *As in the words of Jesus... seek first his kingdom & his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Mt 6:33)*

We know Scripture speaks against certain outward behaviors, as in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, which says, *"...do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men 10 nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God."*

In other words, we can't seek to live in ways which fly in the face of God's direction & leading; things inconsistent with the biblical worldview. Due to God's holiness, anyone who's convinced they can live however they please, can't walk the same corridors & live in harmony with Jesus....and Paul continues...

*11 And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."*

'Were', past tense, four times right there - you're no longer that person....there's a great little passage concerning marriage in Ephesians 5. In it we're told how a husband's love for his wife is reflective of Christ's love for His Bride, the Church...*"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy & blameless."*

Christ cleanses his Bride by washing her with the Word - spiritual formation! The life of God coming alive in us through the washing of the Word as we prepare ourselves for the groom. Jesus makes you holy through carefully washing you with the Word of God & sometimes the Word may sting in open wounds, but it has healing power.

As 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 speaks negatively concerning certain outward behaviors, we remember, behavioral change happens only with true heart change from the inside out. The washing by the Word - and that's what v11 refers to, *you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God*. All that was done to you, it's in the passive voice. It's the receiving of outside intervention which changes us from the inside out.

Reading these heavy passages, we balance them with the whole of Scripture. If my heart's changed, my behavior will change. Sometimes behavior changes in the flash of an eye, sometimes over long periods of time. It depends on the person, how rooted that negative behavior is in them, and how willing & aware we are to walk out our faith in partnership with the Holy Spirit through the spiritual formation process.

We understand as Philippians 2:13 says... *13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose*. However, we also remember, like in Romans 12 & Ephesians 4, we have a part to play, as v12 of *Philippians 2* reveals, *12 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed - not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence - continue to work out your salvation with fear & trembling...*

Working life out through willing obedience to Jesus means the crucial step of Self Denial. Which in & of itself might sound like self-rejection - a tooth & nail, teeth-grinding process full of pain & stress - but that's not self denial in the biblical sense. Self Denial's a calm willing submission to the hand of a loving God with all confidence he'll do a good work in me over time. It's a settled condition, sometimes described as Death of Self. Death of that Almighty Sinful Self which wants to govern our own lives, and seeks only to have it's desires satiated at the cost of our soul, bodily life & community. That thing which leads us astray & kicks at the goads of godly life.

Death of Self, or Self Denial, whichever term you use, is the crucial foundation for Christian Spiritual Formation. This is why we must begin with a solid foundation of belief in the absolute truth of Scripture which flies in the face of our modern societies morally relativistic bent we spoke of last week (and at which liberal theology gnaws at quietly in corners unseen, undermining the Gospel structure altogether).

But, there's not only a need to believe God at His Word, there's a real cost to following Jesus. A cost many don't wish to acknowledge. Jesus spoke of it this way in Matthew 10:34-39 (see also Matthew 16:24-26, Mark 8:35-36, Luke 9:24-25)...

*34 "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 For I have come to turn "a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law - 36 a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.' 37 "Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. 38 Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. 39 Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.*

In Mark 8 Jesus says, *“For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me & for the gospel will save it. 36 What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? 37 Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? 38 If anyone is ashamed of me & my words in this adulterous & sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.” (Mk 8:35-38).*

Part of that Matthew 10 passage doesn’t seem to jive with what we preach - that Jesus came to establish a kingdom of peace - well...he did...but he brings a sword as well! What he’s saying is that in the interim before peace is fully established, his message will, in some relationships, bring discord & division. If Dad doesn’t follow Christ, but Son does, there’s division. If Daughter wholeheartedly follows Jesus & Mom rejects him, there’s discord. Jesus is saying that everything comes second to your relationship to him. That’s a serious cost. Moms, even your own children come second to Jesus - can you say that honestly? Could you be like Abraham & willingly walk your Isaac to the altar? The strangest thing is, that in putting Jesus first...it’s the best thing for your kids! And if you want a living example of this, download Timothy’s story which is in the study material this week. A muslim man comes to Christ & his family tries to kill him.

Then Jesus ends by saying we must take up our own cross & follow him - what’s the cross? Where was Jesus going when he took up his cross? It’s an obvious symbol of death - Jesus was carrying his own instrument of death to the hill at Golgotha. So, he uses this as a foreshadow of his own sacrifice & a symbol of their Death of Self which stands in the way of full allegiance to him.

Because Jesus died & rose again from the grave, we can willingly walk in his footsteps to our own death of self & find freedom from that which has kept us in bondage - the sinful self. So, if you’re just looking to satisfy the Self, to ‘find your life’ & simply satiate your desires, you’ll lose the very thing you seek (remember, last week we said our desires just get bigger appetites) - but whoever willingly gives up the Self for the sake of Jesus will find their life in full handed back to them for eternity.

We simply become willing to lay down that ruined life which plagues us so badly anyway, which has never & won’t work in our favor. Thinking about Golgotha, interestingly we have two criminals crucified to Jesus’ left & right. One of which valued his own self & refuses Jesus, and lost his life that day. The other accepts Jesus, and right away finds life by losing it in Jesus that day! (Luke 23) Living illustrations of his words.

This is all why self denial, or death to self, isn’t burdensome - rather it’s a joy. Because those of us who know Jesus, know he’s wholly good, and has our best intention in mind, even if carrying our cross brings some pain in the moment. In laying down our lives day in & day out we find more & more life all the time! This isn’t something any of us need to fully understand, just like in Romans 12, yet it is something we do need to practice - submission precedes full understanding. In practice we understand given time.

You've heard me say I want to have a faith which says, "I don't care if I die for Jesus." Even our own physical wellbeing can't come before Jesus. How much more so my daily desires which seek to entice & drag me away from true life with Him! When the Self is on the throne of life, covetousness reigns. An old word we don't often use, but it means to have a great desire to have, or to own, something which belongs to someone else. And in Colossians 3:5 Paul reminds us, covetousness is idolatry - it's the idolatry of self which makes my desires paramount over all else. It puts me at the center of all things.

The life of the Flesh Paul speaks of in Romans 8:5-8... *"Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; That is, remember, our blindly following the western individualistic worldview & not a biblical worldview.*

*...but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. 6 The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life & peace. 7 The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. 8 Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God."*

But that's not you, as Paul stated to the Romans just before this in vv1-4... *"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, 2 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin & death. 3 For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, 4 in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."*

So, when Jesus says to find your life you must lose it - he's saying you have to lose the control you exert over yourself & willingly surrender control to Him. That's life in the Spirit. The life in the Flesh is restless, hostile, unsatisfied, inconstant, bored & anxious. It's constantly comparing itself to others. Constantly not measuring up & has old negative tapes running through its head. But life in the Spirit is life & peace. Confident & hopeful. Feels no shame, or condemnation. It's comfortable in its own skin. All our measuring up to others, or the rules & standards have been taken away & satisfied in Christ! God's law wasn't thrown out, his standards stand, and as we come under Christ's covering God sees Christ's perfect record on us! And in that life we find peace. Internal peace which leads to changed outward lives of people who seek true justice & peace themselves, leading to the future final culmination of God's kingdom on earth someday!

If we can turn away from being the center of attention, the ultimate point of reference for ourselves, from doing only that which we *want* to do, of seeking our own kingdoms - only then can we find hope. As we turn away, crucifying the Almighty Self, our lives, our souls, are then preserved & given back to us magnified in comparison to the former self!

And here's the strangest thing...as we come under Christ's wing, his salvation & Lordship, daily submitting ourselves to him, we find a change happening in us. And that

is, we're free to do exactly what we *want* to do! But desires have changed, they've been replaced. Our old selfish, self-centered heart, with its brutish hurtful desires, is dead & buried. Alive in us now is a heart which only wants to please God! We find the only true freedom in which no human law can ever produce, or provide anyone, and that is, due to Christ's work, we'll want the good & be empowered to live it!

Remember Galatians 6:7-8 says, *"Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. 8 Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life."*

The current culture's worldview tells you the goal's to secure, promote & indulge yourself. The Gospel says, set that worldview, that life, aside - submit yourself to Jesus. In doing so, some of us worry we'd be bored, or uninterested in things, or uninteresting ourselves! That we'd have nothing to think on, or do - we'd be boring. The alcoholic can't imagine life without a drink. But in time, none of that matters, as God's life in you pushes all that out by deeper knowledge & new experiences.

Sometimes that's filled with a process of mourning the loss of our sinful self. Letting it go fully, means saying good by to it. It means we actually shovel the dirt on the grave of old behaviors & thoughts, pat it down & walk away. And what Jesus said before which seemed so crazy, or out of touch with reality, is now the only thing which makes sense. He's the great surgeon, cutting hurtful things out of us, as if wielding a scalpel in the operating theater. Under his intentional care, we're healed & begin to walk & enjoy life without the disease which plagued us spiritually & emotionally!

Some of you can't see life differently. You can't see life without a drink in your hand, pornography, mindless entertainment, argumentative & destructive relationships. You can't envision, or imagine a life where you don't think of yourself as stupid, unimportant, or small. You can't fathom living in confidence, peace & joy! You think those who say they're secure in Christ are lying, or simpleminded idiots. But they're not & you can be different. It's a matter of being transformed by the renewing of your mind. Of submitting before understanding - allowing the Holy Spirit to do His work in you through the ministrations of God's Word. Daily washing with the Word. It only takes small intentional decisions of placing yourself in the position of being worked on...How?

Make Sundays priority. Get into a Community Group. Read *Renovation of the Heart*, as you follow along in these sermons. Start praying. Allow Jesus to wash you with His Word daily. Take your thoughts captive to Christ - let him transform them into something worthy of being a child of God. Show up. Engage. Share his message with someone else. Love someone else well. Allow Jesus to work on you through the avenues of this Church Family, as well as His Word & Spirit.

Because, like Calvin said, *"Let this, then, be the first step, to abandon ourselves, and devote the whole energy of our minds to the service of God."*