

Mark 8:34-35 New Covenant Baptist Fellowship Pastor Joseph Krygier June 1 & 8 2008, 1  
Mark 8:34 & 35 "Then he called the crowd along with his disciples and said, 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.'"

In these words the Son of Man is not telling us how we may become Christians. He is not saying that by denying ourselves, and taking up our crosses and following the Lord our sins will be forgiven and we will have eternal life. That is not the point of these important words. They don't tell us how to pass through the door, but they describe the lifestyle of all who have already gone through the door. These verses describe to us the essentials of the Christian life. Every true disciple of the Lord Jesus, they say, denies himself and takes up his cross and follows Christ, but no one does that in order to become a disciple, a believer lives like this to show that he is a disciple. Let me illustrate the point:

There was once a boy who longed to become a soldier. He knew about the great battles of English history, but that didn't make him a soldier. He would go anywhere to see a regiment of soldiers and after he had watched them march past with the drums drumming and the fifes playing he too would swing his arms and march, as straight-backed as a ramrod, but he wasn't a soldier. He lived on a farm and when he was a teenager he had a gun and learned to shoot it very accurately, but shooting that gun did not turn him into a soldier. He went to school and joined a Cadet Corps and was given a uniform to wear, but still he wasn't a soldier. Then one afternoon he went to an army recruitment office and talked to an army officer. That man told him of everything that the army would do for him, what it would give him, how it would train him, and what would be his new status, and so he cheerfully signed the army's enlistment papers, and thus he became a soldier. He was a raw recruit, not yet drilled into shape by a the regimental sergeant-major, but he was a soldier. Then in base camp he began to learn how to march as a soldier, obey as a soldier, and salute as a soldier.

A few years went by and some men began to talk to him about his sins and his need of a Savior. He read the Bible and prayed; he was very anxious to become a Christian. He turned over a new leaf; he stopped swearing and drinking. He changed his life, went to church, and took the Lord's Supper, but still he wasn't a Christian though he was trying so hard to make himself one. One of the Christians saw the plight he was in, and confronted him one day, "How did you become a soldier? Was it by marching like a soldier, or shooting like a soldier, or wearing a uniform like a soldier?" "No," he said, "it was when I heard all that the army had to give me, and I enlisted; I signed my acceptance of its terms. I was ready to receive all that the army could offer." The Christian said to him, "That is also how you become a Christian. Not by ceasing doing bad things, and adding good things like going to church, but by receiving Jesus Christ in all the glory of his person and with all the benefits of his finished work, as he is freely offered to us in the gospel. He is the gift of God. Take him as your Lord and Savior!

The Bible says that to as many as received him to them he gave the power to be called the sons of God even to them that believe on his name. Entrust yourself to him! Believe upon him! Come to him, just as you are without one plea. Do not wait until you are better!"

That is what that soldier did. He knelt down in a quiet place, and he acknowledged that he was a sinner, and that he needed the mercy of God. He asked the Lord to forgive him, and steadily he knew an inward witness in his heart that the Lord Jesus was now his Savior. His sins, not a part of them but all of them, had been forgiven. God had become his Father. Then he determined for the rest of his life to go after Christ, to deny himself, to take up his cross and follow the Savior. He didn't do that to become a Christian (because he already was a Christian), not to get to heaven, not to earn eternal life - God had freely promised him all of that - but because this was the blessed life of all who've become true Christians. He couldn't be a real disciple of Jesus Christ if he failed to live like this.

Much of the confusion in churches today is caused by both pulpit and pew mixing up gospel and law, confusing sanctification with justification, asking people to live the Christian life who have never first become true Christians.

Many is the sermon preached that is moralistic and addressing modified behavior rather than a changed heart.

What wife ever irons the dirty shirts of her husband? Imagine picking up those soiled clothes and putting them on the ironing board? The shirts must first be washed, and then they can be ironed. So the guilt of our sins must be dealt with first of all. Our stains must first be removed. We have to go to Calvary. We need a new heart before we can develop a new character. We must first be made Christians by the grace of God before we can live like Christians. Acting like a Christian is a charade. We must be created a Christian from the inside. We need the heart of a Christian to live the life of Christian. You become a Christian by turning from sin and receiving Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior- man's part. You become a Christian at the same time by God giving you a new birth, making you a new creation, raising you from your death in sin, indwelling you by his Spirit. When God does that to you then you repent and believe in Jesus Christ. That is how you become a Christian. It is a simultaneous instantaneous act of God on the will and the will of man gladly responding.

So, Jesus is not telling them how to become a Christian.

Many of those people who were listening to Jesus were already disciples (v.34).

Disciples in the sense that they were following Him and what he does is to give them three marks of a true Christian so that when they were truly saved, they would know what a believer was.

These are the insignia of being a genuine soldier of Christ. If you are really believing on the Lord Jesus then your life will be characterized by these three things: self-denial, cross-bearing and following Christ wherever he goes.

To take up the cross was a sign of accepting a shameful slave's death, in the eyes of the non-Christian world, and was a real possibility in the case of members of the Roman church in persecution. The image is of a condemned man on his way to the place of execution, shouldering the cross-bar of his own cross and walking through the mocking crowds, just as Jesus did on the way to Calvary. To deny self means refusing to follow any natural inclination, however innocent, that runs contrary to Christ's path for us. (It is something far deeper than going without sugar in Lent, as some Christians do.) Yet this is the only path to true spiritual life; to do anything else is to lose ourselves eternally. In this sense, loss is gain and gain is loss.

Jesus is direct just as He was in the Sermon on the Mount when He challenges us to be true disciples and makes it clear as to what the cost of discipleship is. Right at the beginning of their new understanding that he is in fact the Christ, the Son of the living God He makes it clear how the world responds to Him and what they should expect from the world.

He receives its hatred. The world will crucify him, and these men and women have become his followers. They are going to live like him and here Jesus is preparing them for the same hostility that he's meeting. Life in Christ was going to be a battle.

When Winston Churchill stirred the British nation to war with Nazis he promised us nothing but "blood, toil, tears and sweat." Garibaldi, the great Italian patriot, spoke to his recruits like this, "I offer neither pay, nor quarters, nor provisions; I offer hunger, thirst, forced marches, battles and death. Let him who loves his country in his heart, and not with his lips only, follow me." The hatred of the world is what the Master himself experienced. Should we experience a bed of roses? There was a Roman general called Quintus Fabius Cuncator and he was discussing with his staff how to advance in a war. Someone suggested an attack along a certain route: "It will cost the lives of only a few men," he said. Fabius looked at him, "Are you willing to be one of the few?" Count the cost, those of you who are thinking of becoming Christians. This is the Christian life, denying yourself, taking up your cross and following the Lord Jesus.

“He did not die to make this life easy for us or prosperous. He died to remove every obstacle to our everlasting joy in making much of him. And he calls us to follow him in his sufferings because this life of joyful suffering for Jesus’ sake (Matt. 5:12) shows that he is more valuable than all the earthly rewards that the world lives for (Matt. 13:44; 6:19-20). If you follow Jesus only because he makes life easy now, it will look to the world as though you really love what they love, and Jesus just happens to provide it for you. But if you suffer with Jesus in the pathway of love because he is your supreme treasure, then it will be apparent to the world that your heart is set on a different fortune than theirs. This is why Jesus demands that we deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow him.

Suffering for Jesus Is Temporary; Pleasure in Jesus Is Eternal

Of course, the pain is temporary. He does not call us to eternal suffering. That’s what he rescues us from. “Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life” (John 12:25). “Whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it” (Mark 8:35). Suffering for Jesus is temporary. Pleasure in Jesus is eternal. When Peter said (perhaps with a tinge of self-pity), “See, we have left everything and followed you,” Jesus responded, without coddling Peter’s self-pity, “Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life” (Matt. 19:27, 29). In other words, there is no ultimate sacrifice in following Jesus. “You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just” (Luke 14:14). “Your reward is great in heaven” (Matt. 5:12).

Even before heaven, joy abounds along the hard road that leads through death to resurrection. Nothing can compare with the joy of walking in the light with Jesus as opposed to walking in the darkness without him. Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12). Following Jesus does indeed lead through suffering and death. But the path is luminous with life and truth. Jesus promised, “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20). And where Jesus is present there is joy—joy in sorrow for now, but joy nevertheless. “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:11).“

What Jesus demands of the World John Piper p.68-69

## 1. A TRUE CHRISTIAN DENIES HIMSELF.

"He must deny himself," (v.34) says the Lord Jesus. This is not an option; it is a demand. You have no choice in this matter. If you profess to have received Jesus Christ as your God and Savior then you must deny yourself. We are being called to submit to the authority of the Lord Christ and declare lifelong war on old ego. Deny yourself! What does that mean?

It does not mean that we deny our own individual identity and existence to be

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swallowed up in the so called 'ground of being' as Buddhism seems to teach. That is not what Christ is saying.

It is not that that we are being invited to be puppets, or robots, and give up our freedom or our rationality.

It does not mean that we deny ourselves legitimate God-created pleasures. God has given us all things richly to enjoy, oil to anoint the face and wine to gladden the heart. God created marriage, indeed the New Testament warns that men will rise up in the church who will "forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving" (I Tim. 4:3). So a voluntary decision not to marry, not to eat meat, not to drink certain beverages, not to own property - that kind of thing - is not what the Savior is insisting upon. People are free to choose singleness, or become vegetarians, or total abstainers, or not to possess a television set, if they wish, but the leaders of the church may not impose such things upon a congregation, and no one may say, "I am choosing to abstain from such things in order to do what the Savior is saying here and denying himself." A certain preacher may choose the single life, for example, because he is called to be an itinerant church-planter, always on the move, and it wouldn't be fair on his wife and children to be away from home months at a time. That's the reason he denies himself a wife and fatherhood. A young man chooses not to have a television set because he knows his own personal weakness, that it would be too much of a temptation to him. Those are personal choices, and they may be related to denying self, but you can give up marriage, food, TV and possessions and still not deny yourself. In fact you may be affirming yourself by giving up those things.

James Hervey was an 18th century minister. He had a bout of ill health and so his doctor advised him to follow the ploughman as he ploughed the field and breathe in the smell of new earth. James Hervey was doing this one day, and he knew that the farmer was a Christian, and so as he walked down the furrows with him he began to talk to him about the Bible: "What do you think is the hardest thing in religion?" he asked him. The

man was silent and then said, "I couldn't tell a preacher the answer to that. I'm just a ploughman. What do you think it is?" So Hervey said to him, "I think the hardest thing is to deny sinful self." He went on to explain his answer, but showed some obvious pleasure at his insight into what was the hardest thing. The ploughman listened to all he said, and after a silence he spoke to the minister, "Surely the greatest act of self-denial is to deny ourselves the proud confidence of our own obedience." He nailed Hervey with that observation. The minister was very convicted by the reply. The ploughman knew more about self-denial than he did. Do you understand the point? Here is a Christian and he may have denied himself a wife, and possessions, and he no longer lives in the world. He may live on top of a pole, or in a cave in the desert, dressed in animals' skins, eating locusts and honey, but still self reigns in his life; it is not being denied. Self shows itself in a massive confidence in all these decisions he's made. That is a self-righteousness which is the very opposite of what the Saviour is speaking of here.

You see how important this self-denial is. Notice how the Lord Jesus amplifies this in the next verse: "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it" (v.35). So what is it to lose your life or deny yourself? Basically it is a choice between serving yourself, or serving the Lord Jesus Christ. Or we can say this that it is a choice between denying Jesus Christ as your absolute God, or denying self. The first definitive denial of self comes when you are converted - a man becomes a Christian by believing upon Jesus Christ as his Lord and Master. The Christian is someone who gives up all reliance on his own talents and attainments and achievements and good works for being accepted by God. He pours contempt on all his pride and he wholly leans on the name of Jesus Christ. He even turns away from relying on everything that is religious - his praying and fasting and church attendance and taking holy communion. Remember how the Pharisee in the Temple was so self-admiring about his own religion. He was not like other men - thank God! How different Paul, the former Pharisee of the Pharisees, was. "What things were

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gain to me I have counted as loss for Christ," he said. So at the beginning of the  
Christian life we bid farewell to the old unbelieving self: "you - pitiful self - can do  
nothing to save me," we say, "Jesus only can save me."

Then for the rest of our lives, every day and every passing moment, we continue to say  
no to self and yes to the will of Jesus Christ, pleasing and obeying him in everything.  
There is a daily surrender to Jesus Christ, a daily losing one's own life for Christ and for  
the gospel. "Take my life and let it be consecrated Lord to Thee" - that is the language  
of self-denial. And it shows itself in the life of self-denial. For example, it is a matter of  
what I believe. For me Jesus Christ can say nothing wrong. He is my infallible teacher.  
Again, it is also a matter of how I live. If there are certain worldly advantages that can  
be gained from living in a manner that fails to serve Christ and his church then I deny  
them. I lose my life for him and the gospel, and then I find it. Jonathan Edwards was a  
man of God who after more than twenty years in a church in the large and important  
town of Northampton, New England, was put out of the pulpit. They had had two great  
periods of awakening under his ministry, and yet when the vote came only 24 men  
wanted him to remain. Jonathan Edwards then became the pastor of a congregation in  
a small frontier town. There were twelve white families and about 300 Indians there. He  
cheerfully went there. He didn't sulk. He gave away his life and so he found it. The  
previous pastor had built his manse on a hill a mile outside town. Jonathan Edwards  
built his manse right in the midst of the teepees and wigwams and primitive log cabins.  
He lost his life as the pastor of a big congregation in a big town, and found his life with  
the Indians and the 42 church members in Stockbridge. He had a son, also called  
Jonathan, aged 6, and when the boy left the house in the morning he never spoke a  
word of English all the time he was out of doors. All his friends were Mohawks and  
Mohicans. Jonathan Edwards denied himself for the sake of coming after Christ. From  
his big pulpit in Northampton off he went to a backwoods place like Stockbridge and  
laboured for God there. He loved the Saviour and so he had power to deny himself.



That is what the Savior is asking of us. Deny the self centered, self-deifying urge with which we're born; we must deny ungodliness and worldly lusts; we deny retaliation, self-pity, self-enrichment, self-service, self-absorption, self-praise; we deny our own reputation - we are willing to be dubbed a winebibber and a friend of the wrong sort of people for Christ's sake. Think of John the Baptist and what he said about Jesus Christ, "He must increase and I must decrease." That is self-denial. I want to emphasize this to you, that this is the only way to discover happiness. Someone has said this, that if you want to be miserable, think about yourself. Tell people about yourself. Use the pronoun 'I' as often as possible. Listen greedily to what people say about you. Expect to be appreciated. Be suspicious. Be jealous and envious. Be sensitive to slights. Never forgive a criticism. Trust nobody but yourself. Insist on consideration and respect. Demand agreement with your own views on everything. Sulk if people are not grateful to you for favors shown them. Never forget a service that you've rendered. Shirk your duties if you can. Do as little as possible for others, but such a life, you'll discover, is a life of misery. The only way to save your life is to lose it.

The world refuses to deny itself. It hates to do that. Listen to one of the leaders of the New Age Movement, Shirley MacLaine; her message is the very opposite of Christ's; this is what she says: "The most pleasurable journey you take is through yourself . . . the only sustaining love involvement is with yourself . . . When you look back on your life and try to figure out where you've been and where you're going, when you look at your work, your love affairs, your marriages, your children, your pain, your happiness - when you examine all that closely, what you really find out is that the only person you really go to bed with is yourself . . . The only thing you have is working to the consummation of your own identity. And that's what I've been trying to do all my life." In that outlook of Shirley MacLaine, you will see the very antithesis of what Christ is defining for us here as the abundant life. She wants that one thing, to save her life, and she has lost it!

Harold Frederick "Fred" Shipman (January 14, 1946 – January 13, 2004) was an English general practitioner and convicted serial killer.

On 31 January 2000, Shipman was found guilty of 15 murders and sentenced to life imprisonment with a recommendation from the trial judge that he should never be released. Two years later, Home Secretary David Blunkett agreed with this recommendation.

After his trial, a public inquest chaired by Dame Janet Smith, decided that there was enough evidence to suggest that Shipman had killed a total of over 215 people, about 80 percent of them female. His youngest victim was Peter Lewis, a 41-year-old man.

Much of Britain's legislation concerning health care and medicine was reviewed and modified as a direct and indirect result of Shipman's crimes, especially after the findings of the Shipman Inquiry, which began on September 1, 2000 and lasted almost two years. Shipman is the only British doctor to have been found guilty of murdering his patients[hung himself in his prison cell.

The media interviewed an old colleague of his and asked him what Dr. Shipman was really like. "Oh, he was a very self-confident and self-sufficient man," he said. He had a good sense of self worth. He was a man who never denied himself.

God is calling you to lose your life for Christ and the gospel in order to find it, to deny yourself and come after Jesus Christ. There are just two people in the picture you who are denying your self, and the Savior you are following. No one else matters. No one else counts. It doesn't matter how other Christians behave, you must deny yourself. You're not allowed to follow other people, or measure yourself by other Christians, and, have you noticed this, that Christ will seem to let other good people do things which he won't let you do. Other Christians and ministers who seem very religious and useful, may promote themselves, pull wires, and work schemes to carry out their plans, but you can't do it; and if you attempt it, you'll meet with such failure and rebuke from the Lord as to make you sorely penitent. You have to deny yourself.

The Lord may let others be honoured and put forward, and keep you hidden in obscurity, because he wants you to produce some choice fruit for his coming glory, which can only be produced in the shade. He may let others be great, but keep you small. He may let others do a work for him and also get the credit for it, but perhaps he'll make you work and toil without others knowing how much you're doing; and then to make your work still more precious, he may let others get the credit for the work which you've done, and thus make your reward ten times greater when Jesus comes. You must lose your life for Christ in order truly to find it. Let me give you an illustration of this.

This week a Chinese brother, Jonathan Chao who died of cancer. He was 65 years of age. Jonathan's influence with a network of Chinese mainland pastors, mostly operating underground, indirectly influencing thousands of people, and possibly millions, has been great. Yet his name isn't known to the general public, either in the West or in China. There was be no obituary about him in the newspapers. Because of the nature of his calling he sought no publicity. He couldn't draw the church's attention to his successes. He had to operate in the shadows. Yet he had great influence over preachers and their congregations. He was linked with one organization called the Reformation Translation Fellowship, and he distributed Bibles and also translations of the best Christian books into Chinese, but no-one knew about Jonathan. Go to Google and print in his name and you won't have found any reference to him. He was an invisible man. By all of the conventional standards of achievement, he left no proof of success. He made not effort to do so. He kept all that evidence unavailable.

It's a simple truth, that when we stick to our knitting, doing whatever it is that's most likely to leave a positive legacy after our death, we have spent our time well. Few people leave much of a legacy. Had Jonathan Chao sought fame, his influence would have eluded him. Had he sought wealth, his time would have been used less productively. He stuck to one task of taking the Word of God to the pastors of China,

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and giving them materials to use in their battles with atheism and ancestor worship.

He lost his life for Christ and the gospel and so saved it. I can't imagine who will replace Jonathan Chao. Someone will, but I don't suppose in the few years ahead I shall learn his name, not if he does his job as well as Jonathan Chao. He denied himself and went after Christ. There was Jonathan and there was Christ, just the two of them.

Settle it for ever, that there are always two people only in this eternal relationship, you who are denying yourself, and Jesus Christ whom you are going after. And he has the right to tie your tongue, and chain your hand, and close your eyes, in ways that he doesn't seem to do with other people. What is that to you? Keep coming after him. He is a loving Savior and loves you deeply, and he knows what he's doing and it's for your good. You must deny yourself.

#### A TRUE CHRISTIAN TAKES UP HIS CROSS.

What is this cross the Lord Jesus is referring to here? It was a symbol of repugnance in the first century, especially to a Jew. It symbolized Roman oppression. It was a cursed death of cruelty and dehumanization, and shame. It was part of the Roman apparatus of oppression and terror. Sixty years before Jesus was speaking these words the Roman general Crassus defeated the slave-rebel Spartacus and crucified him and six thousand of his followers on the Appian Way between Rome and Capua. For miles and miles the road was hedged with the writhing dying bodies of crucified men. Then in the days of Mark, the author of this gospel, Nero crucified and burned Christians who were falsely accused of setting fire to Rome. What is this cross that Jesus is referring to?

It is not the cross of our redemption. There is only one saving cross and that is Christ's. There is only one completed work of redemption, and that is Christ's. We contributed nothing but our sin to the cross of salvation. Our crosses are not redeeming crosses. ii] Our crosses are not the same as our thorns in the flesh - the various necessities, illnesses, distresses, weaknesses, hardships and difficulties which come into all our lives in this groaning creation. These are the sufferings of the present time and we are no different from any of our neighbours in the sickness, loss and bereavement that come

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into all our lives. Your impatient boss is not your 'cross'. Your unfair lecturer is not your 'cross'. Your low income is not your 'cross.' Your nagging mother-in-law is not your 'cross'. Don't dignify those difficulties with the title 'my cross.'

Christ got Golgotha because of how he lived and what he said. We get a cross because of living like him and saying what he said. The cross is specifically those things that happen to us because of following Christ. If we were silent, if we looked the other way, if we did what everyone else does, if we lived just like the world lives, then we wouldn't have this cross. We live out the life of Christ in the market place and the P.T.A. and the business world and the lecture room and the lab and then we meet trouble. That is the cross. Kent Hughes says, "Our crosses come from and are proportionate to our dedication to Christ. Difficulties are not an indication of cross-bearing; but difficulties for Christ's sake are." I think of the lecturer who preached in the open air outside his university entrance year after year, and was passed over in being made a professor for a long time, though better qualified than anyone else in the department, because he was unashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ. That was his cross. I think of the Moroccan I met who is no longer welcome in his own home because he has become a Christian, in fact his life is in danger if he should return. That is his cross. I think of the contempt two non-Christian brothers show for their sister who is a Christian, and the obstacles they put in the way of her involvement in her own mother's funeral. That is her cross.

The Lord is talking here about his total claim on the allegiance of the disciples. They were to follow him even if it meant the death of the cross. That is what Christ asked of them. Carrying a cross was required of those whom society condemned. Their rights were all forfeited, and they were being taken to their execution. The man carrying a cross was not going fishing; he was not off bird watching; he wasn't on his way to the cinema. He was going to his death. Jesus is saying "Come after me. Come and die!" That is the description of the life of following Jesus. Paul says, "For thy sake we are

So here is the third constituent of true discipleship: "and follow me." This is not a geographical summons to physically walk behind the Messiah across Galilee and Caesarea Philippi. Following Christ is acknowledging the Sovereignty and the Lordship of Jesus Christ; he's our King; he's our example; he's our God. We are called to commit ourselves totally to him, to follow him without hesitation and without reserve. A leader is one whom men follow, to whom men look; they model themselves upon him, they imitate him, he is their example. He must first be our Savior and we must know him as the one through whom we have forgiveness of sins, through whom we are brought nigh to God, but for the Christian, he is also our example, the one upon whom we model our living. Are we in the midst of the battle? Well, this Christ is the Captain of our salvation, and as we face the enemy, we learn our tactics from Christ himself. Are we running with patience the race that is set before us? Well, he is the author and finisher of faith. He is the one who has run the course and won the prize, and as you look to the end of the course you see the victorious contestant and he is the model for you. You follow him in utter submission to his will. But such following inevitably involves suffering, because to follow Christ is to follow in the steps of one who himself knew suffering and with grief. Christ's whole ministry was in terms of bitter conflict. You never get the impression of someone who is relaxing spiritually and taking it easy. Right the way through he is engaged in conflict and he is facing constantly the onslaught of the evil one. Is it not significant that at some of the key points of his ministry, the gospel narratives mention this fact that, as it were, the devil comes into the open and really attacks the Son of God. That is not to say that the attack was not sustained right the way through, but at certain significant points, key points, the devil mounts his attack all the more powerfully.

See the context of these words of Christ. Peter's eyes were opened to see who he really was here at Caesarea Philippi: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." It was a great moment and almost immediately afterwards Satan got hold of the lips of

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Peter and he used them as his attempt to turn Christ aside from the cross. When you get right to the end, on the threshold of the trial and Calvary, when you see the Lord in the Garden, you see something of the intense agony involved in battling with the evil one. You see Christ there, with sweat dropping like great drops of blood from his forehead, and you hear him - the epistle to the Hebrews puts it so vividly - "with strong crying and tears", as he goes through desperate turmoil of soul.

This is Christian living, this is what it means to follow Christ; it means to be involved in this hand-to-hand combat with the evil one. I fear all too often we have little knowledge of this because our Christian living is such a shallow and superficial thing. The devil does not even need to worry about us and there is no great need to deflect us from the pathway because so often we are already deflected. When a man is seeking to know the Lord and is seeking with all his heart to follow where the Lord leads, let him be assured that he will fight many a desperate battle with the evil one. This one is a subtle foe: he knows every ruse and stratagem. We are not ignorant of Satan's devices. This is the one who knows us personally. He knows our weak points, and no general will mount an assault on the strong point, he attacks on the flanks, he probes for the unguarded point of the defenses. And he's got a brilliant memory as far as our past failures are concerned, and he can bring discouragement by recalling to us the sins of the past and the failures of the past. He is the one who never lets up and he comes now from this direction, now from that. He dresses up the world so that it appears very attractive to us. He dulls our vision of Christ. He dulls our hope of the Celestial City. If we are really following Christ, we'll find that it's tough.

We face, as well, the antagonism of men, and certainly the Lord did. You can recall surely the prophecy of the Old Testament, Isaiah 53, and how was this suffering Servant of Jehovah described? "He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." Read the gospel narrative with that background and how completely, and in detail, it was fulfilled. The way they tried to trip him up, the way they misrepresented him - "a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of publicans and sinners" and the plain implication was that "birds of a feather flock together" - look

at the kind of company he keeps, that is the kind of person he is. When he shows his mighty power, they misrepresent what he does. He cast out demons and they said he was in alliance with the prince of the devils. When they get him near Calvary, contempt and scorn, as it were, flow over. They take him into a barrack room and they hit him and they spit on him, and that is a foul insult to give to any man. When he is taken out from that and taken to Golgotha, he is the butt for the ridicule and the cheap jokes of Roman soldiers, and they hang him on a Cross with a mocking inscription over his head - it was Pilate's last fling of defiance against the Jews and shows his opinion of their King, this is what he will do with their King. We are to follow him!

Right to the end, the Lord of glory was facing hatred, and his followers have always gone the same way. Paul - how sorely it must have stung him when he was on Mars Hill in Athens - facing the intellectuals of that city, and they talk about him as "this babbler", what is he going to talk about now? And any of you who are students will know how sore a thing it is when you are looked on scornfully, as someone clinging desperately to an outdated superstition. When you are dismissed with the superior smile of a person who cannot conceive how you could be so incredulous as to receive that which apparently you do receive. Festus, you remember how he spoke. "Paul," he said, "you are mad", and again you get the sting. Christ says to these disciples, "Follow me; be prepared for the scorn of men, be ready for the contempt, be ready to be misrepresented, be ready to face hostility on every side".

If we are to follow Christ, we must clamp down on any tendency to compromise in order that we may avoid all this; because, of course, we do love comforts. None of us particularly relish being scorned by others, and constantly we are tempted to adjust ourselves to the situation and, indeed, one of the ruses of the devil is to lead us in this direction. How he whispers in our ears suggesting, "You do not really want to be a fanatic do you? You do not want to be an extremist? Why not a bit of moderation?" Indeed, he takes our very true desire and twists it. He knows very well that we are concerned to reach out with the gospel and to bring others to Christ and so he suggests, "Why not modify your gospel somewhat, and why not make it slightly more



about the cross of Christ, but you could present something that would not cause anything like the same offence." The Christian is called not to give way, not to trim his sails to the wind, not to adjust himself to the situation, not to aim at his own comfort. "Let him deny himself and take up his cross," says Christ, "let him follow me."

Yes, of course, it is a hard way, the way of wholehearted discipleship, and yet it is a gloriously rewarding way. Says Christ, "If any man serve me, let him follow me: and where I am, there shall also my servant be." And the Christian finds that this uphill, difficult path, this path of obedience, is the path of close fellowship with Jesus Christ Himself. Disobedience not only grieves the Spirit of God, it is not only an offence to Christ, but disobedience reacts upon the Christian. If we choose the path of disobedience, we lose our close fellowship with the Lord, we lose sight of him; indeed, so often we lose sight of heaven because we are taken up with the affairs of this world. But to obey wholeheartedly, this is the way in which you enjoy that deep and true communion with Christ. Surely that is why, when Paul wrote to the Philippians and spoke about knowing Christ in an increasingly intimate way, he spoke also about knowing the fellowship of his sufferings and being made conformable unto his death. And it is as we learn to suffer with Christ and to die daily with Christ, that we know what it means to walk in fellowship. There is nothing to compare with this experience; to know an intimate communion with the Son of God, to know that Christ is with me, to know that he dwells within, to have his favor, to have his presence. This far outdoes anything that the world can offer. Surely when we look at it from this standpoint, any so-called sacrifice falls into perspective. Is it any sacrifice when you take the rags from a beggar and give him a suit of clothes? Is it sacrifice when you take a person from a slum and re-house him in a new housing estate? Is it any sacrifice if someone has to give up a seaside holiday in order to have an overseas cruise? Well, of course not. Is it any sacrifice to give up the trifles of this world, when you have the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus the Lord and are following him throughout your life?

There is wonderful encouragement in these words of Jesus Christ, because we have the

Mark 8:34-35    New Covenant Baptist Fellowship Pastor Joseph Krygier    June 1 & 8 2008, 18  
utmost confidence that whatever he commands his people to do he also give them  
grace to do it. He never gives us hopelessly impractical and merely idealistic  
commands. If in your life Jesus and the Father have made their abode in you by the  
presence of the Spirit, if you have illimitable access to the indwelling Spirit, then you  
can deny yourself, and you can take up your cross and you can follow Jesus Christ.  
Keep obeying him, and keep asking him for grace to obey him.