

The Blessings of Dying to Self

In this series of articles from John 19:38-42, we were introduced to two “secret disciples,” i.e., men who feared other men more than they revered Jesus Christ. Sadly, these men lived much of their lives unwilling to die to self. What blessings do we miss when we consistently fail to *die to self* in our Christian lives? I want to make three points of application as we conclude this current series.

—Scholars, Bible teachers and pastors have noted that one important way that Joseph and Nicodemus were negatively affected when they were *secret disciples* was that they were not blessed to be able to fellowship with Jesus during his lifetime on earth. What does this mean for Christians? Although Jesus is no longer *bodily* on earth, we’re still blessed to be able to fellowship with him. And yet, we must never presume that we’ll know this sweet and unhindered fellowship when we’re in ongoing patterns of disobedience, including living primarily for self, i.e., “This works for me and Jesus will just have to accept that.” In John 12:26 we read: “If anyone serves me, *he must follow me*; and where I am there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.”

—Second, along with sweet and unhindered fellowship with Jesus Christ which brings about joyful lives and spiritual growth, secret disciples choose to forfeit the blessing of *sweet fellowship with other believers*. We miss blessings when we refuse to use our time and opportunities to serve others and receive from them as God intends. Christian author Dr. James Boice writes: “You....lose that blessed and valuable communion that you should and must have with other Christians. They are with Christ; if you are not with *him*, you are not with *them* either and you will suffer for it. An ember isolated from other embers soon burns out and is nothing but dead ashes. Place it near others and the flame soon grows and sets other wood burning. If you have never learned this before, put it down as a great and unalterable principle: *Christians need other Christians*. You need them. If you think you do not, you are either a fool or hopelessly proud and arrogant.” The very opposite of dying to self is living in a way that’s “me centered” rather than “other centered.”

Christians often make the mistake of reading scripture as if the focus is *only on me*—rather than *primarily* the church as a whole. Pastor and author Nick Batzig writes, “Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones once made the following important observation: ‘If we do not understand the....doctrine of the Church, there is a sense in which all its appeals and exhortations and indicatives will be quite meaningless to us.’ Far too many professing Christians seek doctrinal truths or practical applications of the truths of Scripture for their own personal use without recognizing the fact that God has first and foremost revealed everything in Scripture to the Church collectively considered.”

—Third, in spite of our failures and shortcomings, Jesus loves his true disciples and continues to pour out his amazing grace in our lives. Even though we may need to

receive the grace of discipline at times, Jesus will never give up on us. Going back to our earlier look at Pilgrims Progress and the Interpreters House from my first article in this series, we looked initially at three rooms. Pilgrim was later shown a fourth room where there was a “fire burning against a wall and one standing by it always casting water upon it to quench it.....” The fire pictures the work of grace that’s wrought in the heart of a genuine Christian, but the devil is always casting water on it to put it out. The devil would love to put out the flame of our *passion for Christ*.

As Pilgrim looks, he notices that, rather than the fire being quenched, “the fire burned hotter and hotter.” How could this be? He sees a man with a *vessel of oil* in his hand casting oil on the fire. We learn that the fire of our *passion for Christ* burns bright and continuous as we’re receiving *the oil of Christ’s grace in our lives*. If we’re going to be spiritually healthy Christians, we must consistently live a life of dying to self and living for Christ and his church as Christ commands (John 13:34-35). John Calvin writes that, “...he who sets a higher value on his own life than on the command of God is without excuse.” Living as *secret disciples*, i.e., living only for ourselves rather than for Christ, can never continue indefinitely in the lives of genuine Christians. May God continue to pour out the oil of his grace in our lives as we seek daily to die to self and live for Jesus Christ.

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