

PRACTICAL STEPS IN DYING TO SELF

INTRODUCTION:

In last week's introduction, I mentioned that there was *never* a disconnect between Jesus' teaching and His life—He *always* practiced what He preached! Sadly, that is not always the case *with me*. In fact, I was painfully reminded of that shortly after I got home from church last Sunday!

Just to refresh your memory, last week we looked at humility in the *teaching* of Jesus and I shared with you 3 somewhat paradoxical truths that Jesus taught.

- 1. It is better to serve than to be served.** We saw that in Lk 22:24-27 where Jesus contrasted greatness in the eyes of the world with greatness in the eyes of God.
- 2. The way up is down.** We saw that in Lk 14:7-11 where Jesus, after **watching** how those that were bidden to a wedding chose their seats, **taught** them to pick the low place—not the high one.
- 3. The last one we looked at—and the one that is probably the most paradoxical of all—is that the “way to save our life, is to lose it.”** The thrust of Jesus' teaching was that we are to **deny** ourselves. We are to **take up our cross** and follow Him. That doesn't mean we merely **bear our physical ailments and trials**, nor does it mean we are to **wear “cross” jewelry**. It means we are to **die to self** so we can live whole-heartedly for God!

I left church Sunday feeling as though I taught you the *importance* of dying to self, but felt that I failed to give you some *practical ways* to apply it to your life. And then I got home and tackled replacing the basket strainer on one side of our sink. It wasn't until I had the old one removed that I realized that the *old strainer hung down lower* than the new one and that I would have to do some *revamping* of the drainpipes to get them to line up properly.

The hardware store was closed, of course, and I did not feel like driving to Tomah. My *lack* of being dead to self was evident when my wife asked a simple question like, “Why *did you remove it* when you saw the new one was a different size?” And then there was her reminder that my plumbing success rate (putting something together without it leaking) isn't much over 50%!

Sorry to say, my feelings were getting hurt—something that shouldn't happen so quickly if I were dead to self! And on Thursday morning on the way to work, I turned on my radio to hear this from John MacArthur about husbands:

“Somewhere along your pilgrimage as a Christian, you need to **learn to die to yourself regularly**. It saves you from being **defensive, revengeful, retaliatory, hostile**, accumulating the list of things against you.... When your good is evil spoken of, when she misunderstands you, when your desires are not interesting to her, when your advice is disregarded, and your opinions are ridiculed, and when you are abused, when you are mistreated, or misunderstood, and you **refuse to let anger rise in your heart or even defend yourself**, that is **dying to self.**”

For the sake of time, I'm skipping some of what he said, but he ended with this:

“And, gentlemen, when you can **receive correction and reproof from your wife**, and humbly submit inwardly as well as outwardly, **feel no rebellion**, and **feel no resentment** rising within your heart, *that is dying to self.*”

Are you there yet? I'm not—and my guess is that you aren't either!

And so, I felt led to come back to the concept of “dying to self” to hopefully provide some practical steps that will help us all—not just husbands—improve in this area of our lives.

So what are some practical steps in dying to self? First, I believe we need to consider...

1. The reality that self is a problem

Please take your Bibles and turn to Romans 7, starting with v 18. Some of you may be familiar with these verses, but my guess is that they may be **new** to others. God leads Paul to elaborate on the battle that he has with his sinful, selfish nature in a way that I believe we can all relate to.

“¹⁸For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing:”

“Flesh” is our sinful **nature**; our natural self—not our skin. ‘There is nothing good in my sinful nature—it is selfish to the core!’

“for to will is present with me;” – ‘I have a new desire to do right’

“but how to perform that which is good I find not.”

‘**How to do** the good that I want to do, I can’t find it—I can’t figure it out.’

“¹⁹For the good that I would I do not:”—‘the good that I want to do, I fail to do’—“but the evil which I would not, that I do.” My sin nature drags me down so that I **fail** to do the **good** that I want to do—and end up doing the evil that I don’t want to do!

“²⁰Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.” Paul recognizes that his sin nature is what is within him fighting his new nature and, in essence, he **disassociates** himself from that part of himself. ‘It’s not me—it’s not the **real** me which is the new me—it is the **old** me.’

In v 24, we see Paul’s despair and frustration over the battle with his sin nature. “²⁴O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the **body of this death**?”

--Let’s make sure we don’t hurry past what Paul is asking.

--He is **not** asking, who is going to deliver me from **the death of my body**.

What he is asking, is how can I be delivered from this **body of sin**—this selfish nature within me—this body of death—that drags me down and keeps me from doing right?

He doesn’t **stay** discouraged, though. Look at v 25 where he answers the question he just asked.

“²⁵I thank God **through Jesus Christ** our Lord.” ‘Just as Jesus delivered me from the penalty of my sin, He also delivers from the **power** of sin. It does not have to rule over me.’

He then adds: “So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.” ‘The real me—the new me—serves God, but this battle with my sinful self, will continue to drag me down. It will not be going away—this battle will not end—until I’m in heaven with Christ.’

So, we see here the reality that our sin nature—our inner self; sometimes referred to as our old man—gives us trouble when it comes to pleasing and serving God.

2. Remember that God is working to make you more like Jesus

It is good to be reminded from time to time that God has a **goal** for us—and it is to make us like Jesus! God’s goal is not necessarily to make us **happy**—it is for us to be **humble and holy**.

Jesus was humble and dependent on the Father—and God wants us to be that way too!

Romans 8:29 “For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be **conformed to the image of His Son**, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.”

God knows who will trust Christ and be saved. But being saved from the penalty of our sins is only one aspect of our salvation. Some day we will be **glorified**—be sin-free, in heaven, and have a body like Christ’s! But between now and then, God is **working on us** and **in us**. He is molding us to make us more like Christ.

Phil 1:6 “Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath **begun a good work in you** will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:” God **began** the good work in you—and He is going to keep on doing it until He is done—which is when you meet Jesus!

Turn to I Peter 2. Notice as we read these verses that Peter is letting them know that sometimes they will **suffer for doing right**—the same way Jesus did! I would argue that one reason God allows that to happen is to help us in the process of dying to self!

“¹⁹ For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully.”

It is commendable in the sight of God to do right—even if you end up suffering for it.

²⁰ For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.

If you do **wrong**—and take patiently your punishment—so what? But if you **do right and suffer**—and take it with the right attitude—this is acceptable—this is commended—by God.

²¹ For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps: ²² Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth: ²³ Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously:”

Jesus left us an example and we are to follow in His steps.

--Jesus didn't lash out at those who mocked Him—we aren't supposed to, either.

--Jesus didn't threaten those who mistreated Him—we aren't supposed to, either.

Let's not forget this truth—God may be using your neighbor...or boss...or co-worker...or relative...or child...or spouse...to show you your need to die to self—and help you get there, so to speak!

3. Our responsibility in dying to self

So, what are we supposed to do? **Realizing** that our sin nature is the problem—and **remembering** that God will bring things into our life to help us see the problem—doesn't really give us insight as to our **responsibility**. What is our responsibility; what is it that God wants us to do?

Turn now to Romans 6, v 11 “Likewise **reckon ye also yourselves to be dead** indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

The first thing God wants us to do is to... A. Reckon ourselves dead to sin

In the Greek it is in the **imperative**, meaning it is a command. We are commanded to reckon ourselves as being dead. But what does **reckon** mean?

“Reckon” is an accounting term that means to count, compute, calculate. It also means to pass to one's account; to write it in the ledger.

What is it that we are to write down in our ledger? That I am **dead to sin**—and **dead to self!** That is the attitude that I am to have. It's the same attitude of...

Galatians 2:20 “I am **crucified with Christ**: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.”

We must have the mindset then, that we are dead. That is not our **only** responsibility, though. In verses 12 and 13 we see how we are to put that into practice.

I'm calling it a... B. Resolve not to yield to self

Verse 12 “Let not sin therefore **reign** in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.”

Don't let sin **rule** you; don't let it be your master!

Verse 13 “Neither **yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin**: but yield yourselves unto God,”

--Your members are your body parts—don't yield them to be used as instruments for sinning

--Don't yield your **eyes** to look on that which God forbids—you are dead, and your **eyes** belong to God!
--Don't yield your **hands** to take that which belongs to someone else...or hurt someone else...or touch someone else when they don't want you to. Why? Because you are dead—and your **hands** belong to God!
--Don't yield your **mouth** to complain...or to say hurtful things...or untrue things. Why? Because you are dead—and your **mouth** belongs to God.

Romans 13:14 “But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and **make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts** thereof.” Don't make provisions—don't provide for—the sinful desires of your selfish nature!

What is our responsibility? We are to **reckon ourselves** as being dead to self, then **resolve** not to yield ourselves to sin. Our master is who we yield to. Only two choices on the shelf—pleasing **God** or pleasing **self**!

Some of you might be thinking, ‘Wow, Pastor, the Christian life doesn't sound like much fun! I'm supposed to **serve others** instead of being served...I'm to **seek the low place** instead of the high place...and I'm to **count myself dead and not live to please me anymore**. Where is the joy in all of that?

Lastly, let's consider... **4. The reward of dying to self**

Jesus Himself teaches us of the reward that a life yielded to God brings.

Please turn to John 12. Notice v 25—one of the six verses where Jesus teaches that if we want to **save** our life, we need to lose it. Here Jesus says we are to **hate our life** in this world, in order to keep it.

Listen carefully, Jesus does not want us walking around saying, ‘**I hate my life**; I hate my life; I hate my life!’ What He **does** want, though, is for our focus to be so much on **loving and pleasing and serving God**, that in comparison it looks like we don't care about ourselves at all!

Now for the rewards. First, **A. Fruit**

We see that in v 24 where we have this wonderful word-picture that gives Jesus gives us regarding a seed. “Except a corn of wheat”—except a kernel of wheat—“fall into the ground and **die**, it abideth alone...”

Although we may not plant wheat, we may plant corn...or cucumbers...or squash. To do that, we have to put it in the ground and **bury** it. Leaving it in the seed packet will not cause it to grow and bring forth fruit—but putting it in the ground will!

That is the picture Jesus uses in connection with our **life**. If we die to self—and live for Him—we will bear fruit. What kind of fruit? Not told exactly, but the context is certainly about Jesus giving up His life so that we can have eternal life. We see that in verse 23...and 27.

Just as Jesus dying to self **brought people to God**; our dying to self can be used of God to **bring people to Jesus**. When we **love God**, we should **want to tell others** about Him. When we **live for God**, others will see that in our lives. I don't think I'm going out on a limb to say that a **self-loving, self-pleasing, and self-serving** Christian is **not used of God** very much to bring other souls to Jesus!

It is also true that the **fruit of the Spirit**—love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance—is a fruit that God produces in our life when we die to self.

Not the only reward, though. There is also the reward of **B. Favor**

Last part of v 26 “...if any man serve me, him will my Father honour.” Think about that—being honored by God! What does that mean?

--To have God say to us, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant...” will certainly be an honor! But I believe it could also mean having **God's favor**—His **smile upon us**—right now in **this** life. It is the blessing of assurance in our hearts that we are pleasing God—and that He is letting us know what we are doing is pleasing to Him!
Is dying to self **worth it**? Jesus tells us it is!

How do we die to self; what is our responsibility? Stop yielding to self—and start yielding to God!

So what does God want us to do in light of what we have heard from His Word today?

1. First, please know that if you are **not** saved—if you are not born again...if you are not a child of God—you cannot die to self. Why? Because you only have **one** nature—your sinful nature! What God wants you to do is give up on trying to get yourself to heaven—and receive Jesus as your Savior! Have you done that?
2. Second, if we are a child of God, He obviously wants us to die to self! He wants us to stop making excuses—and stop “caving in” to sin. We need to stop yielding to our sinful desires—and start yielding to God!

Galatians 5:24 “And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.”-