

A Declaration of Those Things Which Are Most Surely Believed Among Us

An Expositional Study of **The Gospel According to Luke**
Chapter 9- Luke 9:23-26

168- The Characteristics of Saving Faith- Part 2

July 8, 2012

Luke 9:23-26

23 And He was saying to *them* all, "**If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.**

24 "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his ¹life for My sake, he is the one who will save it.

25 "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself?

26 "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and *the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.*

To the Glory of God

Now last week- we found out that being saved and walking with God are the same thing; Serving Christ and being born again by Christ are the same thing; Bearing Fruit and being Saved are the same thing- they are just two different ways to express the very same Truth. The Bible teaches that a saved person walks with God and those who walk with God for any length of time- are saved. If you are saved- you will serve the Lord and if you serve the Lord- it is because you have been gloriously and wondrously and eternally saved. Now it is true that serving God does not *cause* or *bring about* or *produce* Salvation- but a person who has been truly regenerate by the Sovereign Move of God's Spirit *reflects* or *responds* to that Sovereign Salvation by automatically loving God and the things of God and a truly born again soul will *naturally* and *normally* pursue after God and pursue after Truth and pursue after holiness and will desire and seek and labor to live a life in

accord with God's Will and God's Word precisely because he has that new Divine nature.

That is what Jesus is teaching here in this Passage that our brother just read to us. So the notion that is so popular in the modern Church that *some* saved people go on with the Lord into actually serving Him and following Him and obeying Him- while others- who are equally saved- do not- is a myth- it isn't true; it is a lie; the Bible does not teach it. So Salvation and Discipleship are the same thing and following Jesus and being saved are the same thing. Or to say it in the words of our text- looking again at verse 23,

If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.

Now we must understand that these Words by Jesus here are not an invitation to some form of higher Christian living for those who voluntarily choose to participate in at some point after they were saved- no, this is Christ's Own Personal description of what true and genuine Biblical Salvation is. Salvation does all of that to every individual who is so blessed to have God graciously rescue them from the Wrath of God:

- ✓ They will deny themselves
- ✓ They will take up their cross
- ✓ They will follow Jesus

In other words- there is no such thing as anyone living continually under the bondage of sin after they are saved. There is no such thing as anyone living in continual defeat over habitual sins after they are saved; no such thing as anyone walking in premeditated and ongoing disobedience and being saved; no such thing as being saved and not hungering and thirsting after Righteousness; no such thing as being saved and not wishing to come after Jesus; no such thing as being saved and not denying the lusts of the flesh; no such thing as being saved and not taking up your cross; no such thing as being saved and not following Jesus.

Now what we must understand is that the dominant view of many people in the modern Church about Salvation is one that is Man- made; it is false; it is unbiblical; it is pagan in its origins and many of the

foundational teachings about Salvation that are taught from the pulpits of the American Church are actually the work and the labor and the logic and the teachings of a fourth Century heretic named, Pelagius and are not found anywhere in Scripture.

In fact many of these foundational teachings about Salvation in the modern Church are actually *opposed* to what the Bible *does* say and they are fighting *against* true and eternal Salvation and are not a help at all- but actually a hindrance to people being truly born again.

The dominant foundational teaching about Salvation in many parts of modern evangelicalism in America- which are taught by very prominent seminaries and many Bible colleges and are regurgitated from many pulpits is that all a person needs to do to be saved is to "*believe in Jesus*" or "*accept Jesus into their hearts*" and then God is eternally stuck with you and then somewhere down the road- if the Spirit moves on you and if you feel the need- you then at some point after Salvation- you "make" Jesus the Lord of your life and that's when you get really serious about obedience and service. But that's not what the Bible teaches at all.

The Theology that teaches that you have to "make" Jesus the Lord of your life after Salvation is as flawed and is as unbiblical as the Theology that teaches that you have to be "filled" with the Holy Spirit after Salvation or that you have to get rid of generational curses after Salvation or that you have to be anointed with a prophetic utterance at some point after Salvation and any other variation of the false and unbiblical notion that Salvation really just gets the ball rolling and if you really want to be obedient or "super powered" or really, really, really used by God- then you need to "do" or "allow" or "have" or "get" something else later- after you are saved.

And the sum total of all the benefit of all of these Man-made and false and unbiblical teachings is that they *belittle* and *diminish* and *limit* the Beauty and the Power and the Glory of true Biblical Sovereign Salvation and all of them put together in all of their glory do *not* add a single inch of spiritual growth to *anyone's* life; they do *not* provide any power or anointing to *anyone*; and they do *not* assist *anyone* at all- because all of these teachings are patently false and they are all the invention of the mind of Man. God did not speak them. And they all serve to lead their followers down the wrong road.

The simple Message here in this Biblical Passage is that Salvation and Discipleship; Salvation and Obedience; are the same thing; Being saved and bearing fruit is the same thing; Being saved and loving Jesus is the same thing; being saved and denying yourself and taking up your cross and following Jesus is the exact same thing. And every time Jesus said things like, *"If you want to follow Me, you have to count the cost, you have to take up the cross, you have to deny yourself, you have to obey Me, follow Me, keep My Word."* - He was *not* calling people who were already Christians to some higher level of Christian Service or Obedience- He was calling people who were lost and unsaved to repent and be saved.

When Jesus gave us the "Great Commission" or the "Grand Command", He said,

Matthew 28:18-20

18 ... All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,

20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

And that's what we do. So a "disciple" is a "believer" and all true believers are disciples of the Lord. There is no such thing as somebody being a believer and not being a disciple and there is no such thing as somebody being a disciple and not a believer- the two words mean the same thing.

And everywhere the word, "disciple" is used throughout The Book of the Acts- like: **The Acts 6:1, 2, 7; The Acts 11:26; 14:20 and 22; The Acts 15:10**, it's just another word for "believer". So when Jesus Calls someone to be a disciple- He is calling them to become a Christian; a follower; a believer.

True believers are those who have come to Christ in total desperation for Him to mercifully and graciously save them and rescue them from the Wrath of God then set them on a life-long course which empowers and equips them to live with abandon to this Radical Love in Jesus Christ- to the Glory of God- as a "paid for" bond-slave.

And lest some of you begin to think that I am being a bit radical about this- please turn with me to **Luke 14-** to read for yourself the red-

letter Words of our Lord Jesus- what he said about this subject found in verses 26-35 of **Luke 14:**

26 "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.

27 "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.

28 "For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it?

29 "Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him,

30 saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'

31 "Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand?

32 "Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace.

33 "So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions.

34 "Therefore, salt is good; but if even salt has become tasteless, with what will it be seasoned?

35 "It is useless either for the soil or for the manure pile; it is thrown out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

So Jesus is not talking about the pew sitters or those who are superficial like the rocky soil where the seed goes in and there's an emotional response but it's superficial and pressure and tribulation and persecution comes and the plant dies because it has no real root.

They're not like the weedy soil where the love of the things of the world and the love of riches still dominates the heart and so the seed goes in, there's a momentary response, but the life has never divested itself of itself. And so no fruit ever comes and the plant withers and dies.

True Salvation, the really good soil, occurs when somebody understands that when we ask the Lord Jesus to save us from hell and forgive our sin and give us eternal life- we are- at the same time-

submitting everything about ourselves to the Lordship and Control of this same Jesus Christ.

Several years ago- John Stott- in his book Basic Christianity, wrote,

"The Christian landscape is strewn with the wreckage of derelict half-built towers. The ruins of those who began to build them were unable to finish for thousands of people still ignore Christ's warning and undertake to follow Him without first pausing to reflect on the cost of doing so. The result is the great scandal of Christendom today, so-called nominal Christianity. In countries in which Christian civilization has spread, large numbers of people have covered themselves with a decent but thin veneer of Christianity. They have allowed themselves to become somewhat involved, enough to be respectable but not enough to be uncomfortable. Their religion is a great soft cushion. It protects them from the hard unpleasantness of life while changing its place and shape to suit their convenience. No wonder the cynics speak of hypocrites in the church and dismiss religion as escapism"

And Stott is saying the same thing that James Montgomery Boice said.

"Western civilization with its high level of comfort is a perfect place for nominal Christianity to exist. I've never seen it in Eastern Europe. You wouldn't see it under Communist oppression because to be any kind of Christian would cost you your life so nobody there is a shallow, superficial, half-committed Christian because that would bring the same effect as the real thing- you'd lose your life. So only those who are willing to go all the way embrace the Gospel in those countries."

So the Divine Call to Salvation that is made by Jesus here in **Luke 9-** is a Call to full commitment and a slave-like existence after the point of Forgiveness- with absolutely nothing knowingly held back. And there's no more definitive text to go to than this one and those others that are similar to this one and to hear from the Lips of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. And let's understand what we're talking about here.

So this is not a service to get already saved people to try to be a little more committed and little more faithful and a little more involved in the Church. No, this is a Gospel Presentation here. This is an Evangelistic Service held by Jesus here to unsaved people. This is how

Jesus presented Salvation to lost people. You want to know how to witness to people? How to communicate the Gospel? Here it is- this is how Jesus did it.

And frankly, it drops like a bomb. It isn't gentle; it isn't benign; it isn't laid back; and it isn't timid. This method of evangelizing the lost is patently offensive; it is patently "in- your- face"; it is patently insulting- and it made people just as mad at Jesus when He said these things as it will today when you say them.

This is a dangerous and an explosive approach to Evangelism- but it is the Way that Jesus carried it out. It is the Way that the Apostles carried Evangelism out and it is the way that we should carry it out in our day as well. And to even suggest that Discipleship is the same thing as true Salvation today will blow a hole in the evangelical turf and reveal under the surface the terrible weakness of the watered down gospel of our day.

We have a cheap evangelism going on today. An Evangelism that denies God's Sovereignty; that doesn't preach about Original Sin and wants no part of Human Depravity. An evangelism that requires no conviction or repentance from sin; an evangelism that expects people to live as though they have been redeemed and where you can go to heaven- if only you just agree that there is some form of a "god" who made things- probably through evolution; an evangelism that pays more attention to social and temporary issues than eternal matters; and evangelism where good Mormons and good Jehovah's Witnesses and good Roman Catholics are all holding hands with weak vacillating Protestants.

But we must understand that those are not God's terms for Heaven. Those aren't Jesus' terms. Jesus came to this earth as the proto-typical Divine Evangelist. And He's given us the pattern in His Word on how to evangelize the lost and it doesn't even resemble what the modern Church is teaching and doing in our day.

And what you do when you evangelize and preach the Gospel and present the Gospel to someone is that you take them very clearly to the realization that to be saved is to follow Christ and to be born again is to be a true disciple. We must tell the world that to be a Christian- you must deny yourself. So as an ongoing expression of your daily life- you voluntarily choose not to indulge in the lusts of your flesh- but you deny or resist or fight against what the lost pagan world does and thinks and

says and you consciously live counterintuitive to the pleasures of this life- out of your deep respect and admiration for Who Jesus is and out of your deep and abiding love for what this Jesus has done for you in rescuing you from the Wrath of God against your sins and for delivering you into the Kingdom of God. But Jesus isn't finished.

And you must take up your cross. You do not seek to be free from your cross; you do not pray for your cross to lift from you; you do not murmur about your cross or complain about your cross or bellyache about your cross or bind your cross or cast it from you. No, Jesus said to take up your cross. So you pick that burden up which God has laid at your feet- regardless of what your plans are – regardless of what picking up the cross does to you personally- and you struggle to carry it to the Glory of God. But Jesus is not yet finished.

And then you follow Jesus. You do not lead Jesus nor do you even walk at the same pace as Jesus- but you follow behind- with Jesus in the lead. You do not make plans for yourself; you do not live according to the dictates of your own heart; you do not do what is right in your own eyes; you do not live your life for your own glory- but you follow Jesus- as a slave; as someone who has been bought and paid for; as someone whose body and mind and thoughts and actions no longer belong to yourself. But He's still not finished.

You deny yourself and you take up your cross and you follow Jesus- but you do all this with joy; with genuine relish; with complete delight. And you actually find total and complete satisfaction as you are humbled at His Feet. Or you can keep all your sins and perish in a devil's hell. That's the deal- absolute unconditional surrender; unilateral disarmament; and total capitulation. Or you can keep your sins and face God on Judgment Day.

You want God to grant Mercy and Grace to forgive you of all your wickedness; you want God to absolve you of eternal damnation for your repeated evil; you want God to grant you eternal life? He will- but on His terms- not yours; according to His Will- not yours; and to His Glory- not yours. And, dear friends- we must be faithful to tell the world that this is what it means to actually be saved.

You say, "*Come on, Brother Blair- people in the 21st Century are simply not going to buy into this. There is no self- improvement in this message- no self-esteem- no message of self- gratification; no avenue of self-fulfillment here.*" I'm so glad you noticed that- because that's true.

In fact- there is nothing about the "self" of Man in anything Jesus or the Apostles ever said or taught.

So, Brother Blair- how do you expect anyone to be interested in this kind of Gospel in our day? The very same way they were interested in the Gospel in Jesus' day and the Apostles' day. By preaching the "Bad News" first.

You see, the "Good News" of Jesus graciously rescuing unworthy sinners from eternal damnation pre-supposes that people are unworthy sinners. And it also pre-supposes that there is an eternal damnation that is certain to come upon those unworthy sinners. So by clearly articulating forgotten Biblical Truths such as Original Sin and Human Depravity and how that it is both a good and a right thing for God to damn unrepentant sinners in everlasting destruction- the self-righteous arrogance and pride of Man- that is inherent in his fallen nature will be injured; insulted; abased and systematically destroyed. This leaves the unsaved Man defenseless and helpless and **naked and open unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do. (Hebrews 4:13).**

And if God has chosen them for Salvation from before the foundation of the world- He will take that Gospel and through the foolishness of the Word preached- God the Holy Spirit will Sovereignly open their blinded eyes and unstopp their deaf ears and take out of them a stony hart and give them a heart of flesh and God will Sovereignly grant them repentance and God will Sovereignly give these people who are dead in trespasses and sins- new Divine Life where they can see and hear and believe the Gospel.

And supernaturally and miraculously empowered- these people will desire to confess all their wicked sins and they will desire to turn away from their wicked ways and they will desire to trust in the finished Work of Jesus Christ and God will gloriously save them to the uttermost.

And the very first human response to the Great Love that has been shed abroad in their hearts is that these redeemed and regenerate souls will both desire and enjoy to deny themselves; take up their cross and follow Jesus- all the days of their life.

So let's go back to the text and let's go back to the Divine Principle- so we can set our feet on a foundation here. Back to **Luke 9:23:**

And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.

Dr. Luke writes here that Jesus was saying to "them all"- He was speaking to the 12 Apostles and he was also speaking to the other followers in the crowd that were with Him. Luke says that Jesus was saying these words to all of them. He wasn't making an exception here to anyone. What Jesus says to the Apostles- He was also saying to the crowd in general and what He was saying to the crowd in general- He was also saying to the Apostles. And what did Jesus say to all of them?

If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.

Now the phrase- "**If anyone wishes to come after Me**" is a Gospel invitation. If anyone wants to be My true follower; if anyone wants to be rescued from God's Wrath; if anyone wants to go to heaven forever; If anyone wants to be saved. If any man- from any country; living under any culture; speaking any language; living at any point of time in history- if any man wishes to come after Jesus Christ- here is what you must do:

- ✓ He must deny himself
- ✓ He must take up his cross
- ✓ He must follow Jesus

So this isn't about you having your needs met. This isn't about you getting what you want. This isn't about God making much of you. This isn't about you hitting more homeruns or having whiter and brighter teeth. This is about you saying "no" to all of your needs, desires, hopes, ambitions, dreams, and plans. And this is about you embracing all of Jesus' desires, hopes, ambitions, dreams, and plans. This is not about frivolous surface emotional earthly and temporary satisfaction and happiness- this is about living sacrificially to the Glory of God and finding deep and abiding satisfaction and the fullness of joy in doing that.

So there's a level of desperation here. And so we see that there are three distinct Characteristics of what is called "Saving Faith" – which is

the kind of faith that does not originate from inside the human vessel; the kind of faith that is a gracious gift from God; and the kind of faith that always and in all cases leads the person to true and genuine and lasting and eternal Salvation. So let's just take them one at a time and they'll help us to understand more as we look at each one.

First Characteristic of Saving Faith- Jesus is Lord

Luke 9:23a

And He was saying to *them* all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me...

This Statement by Jesus assumes that He is Lord and Christ and God and King and Master and Savior. How does Jesus have the Authority to make such a statement in the first place? Because Jesus is God in human flesh. All of the Gospels; all of the Epistles; all of 2,000 years of Church History tells us that the bold and unapologetic and clear and precise Confession of the Christian Church and of all true genuine believers from all time is that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully Man in the same body at the same time without conflict or contradiction. Jesus is the most unique Person in all of history. Nobody was ever like Jesus and nobody ever could be. Jesus was God Almighty draped with human flesh; He is God the Father with a body; He is Yahweh plus full humanity.

And in this age of downplaying Sound Biblical Doctrine while ancient heresies which either deny or confuse the issue of Who Jesus is are becoming more and more accepted in the modern Church- we must be crystal clear about Who Jesus is. Jesus is God. Jesus is Deity; Jesus is Divine. That is the Confession on which the Christian Church is built and that is the Confession on which every true believer must believe and make with his mouth- Jesus Christ is Lord!

You believe that Jesus is God or you die in your sins. You confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord- that Jesus is Yahweh in a human body- or you die in your sins. Nobody is saved; nobody goes to heaven nobody has his sins forgiven if he denies that Jesus is both God and Man.

And it is the fact that Jesus is God that allows Him to make such a profound Statement like this. So you want to follow Him? You want to come after Him? Then you believe and you confess. You believe and

say yes, Jesus is Lord. Yes He died. Yes He rose. Yes, He ascended. Yes, He's coming back. So since Jesus is God and you're not; and since you are the sinner who needs his sins forgiven; and since you are the sinner who needs to be rescued from God's Wrath; since you are the sinful one- then it only makes sense that you go to the sinless One for Grace and Forgiveness. Since you are the weak one- you go to the Powerful One; since you are the diseased one- you go to the Perfect One; since you are the one below- you go to the One from above.

Without the realization and conviction and Jesus Christ si God Almighty in human flesh- no Salvation ha occurred. Saving Faith will always bring that conviction.

Second Characteristic of Saving Faith- We Must Deny Ourselves

Luke 9:23b

... If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself...

So if God has given you the desire to come after Jesus- it requires self-denial. The Greek word here is *arnesitho* which is a very strong expression- which literally means: *to disown something*. So Jesus says here- those who desire to come after Him into Salvation and Forgiveness must disown himself. It means: *to refuse association with someone*. So Salvation produces in a person the desire and the power to refuse to associate with yourself. Pretty extreme. It means: *rejecting companionship of someone where you literally do not want their company*. So you so hate your sin; your eyes have been Sovereignly opened to the point where you see your sin and the Righteousness of Jesus that is imputed to; that now lives in you; the Spirit of God that now walks in you now hates that sin so much that you come to Christ and here's the first thing say as you come, "*I can no longer stand to be associated with myself. I've had it with me. I don't want anything more of my own life.*" That's the depth of the understanding of what Jesus is saying here.

It's not, "*I like my life and I like my world and I basically like the direction I'm going, but, Jesus, there are just a few things in my life I need help with- so could You just fix those few things wrong with me so I can move up a little faster and a little higher in life?*" It's not about that.

It's not about, "*I am tired of being second place. I want Jesus to make me first so I can have the best things in life.*" No, it's about, "*I've had it with everything that I am, I'm sick of my natural depraved impotent sinful self.*" It's about dis-owning yourself. It's about desiring to never be associated with yourself again the way you were before. It's about "*I've had it with me. I'm sick of myself. I don't want anymore of myself. I realize how sinful I am and how I dishonor God and I'm overwhelmed with my sinfulness and I want so badly to please the Lord with my life*". This is the stuff of true conversion. The heart sees in itself only sin, only impotence, only failure, only unworthiness and seeks to be rescued. And it really doesn't set any terms for that at all. I am in such a desperate situation- You just tell me what I need to do and I'll be happy to do it. The Wrath of God is bearing down on me like a freight train at 300 miles an hour and I'm chained to the railroad tracks and I am so desperate because I realize that I am spiritually bankrupt and I cannot contribute anything to my own Salvation.

So in this understanding the "self" is cast away totally. You give up all dependence on yourself, all trust in yourself, all confidence in who and what you are by nature. You give up everything and anything. It's like the man who bought the pearl of great price, sold everything to buy the pearl- and that Pearl is Christ. And the man who bought the treasure in the field sold everything to buy the treasure in the field, literally giving up everything he was, everything he accumulated because Christ was so precious to him. It's really coming to the end of yourself. That's when people get saved, that's when they really get saved when they come to this very, very clear understanding of their spiritual desperation.

In fact, I'll give you an illustration of it in **Philippians 3**. Please turn over to **Philippians 3:3**. This is just a classic illustration of what we're talking about here with this self-denial. The Apostle Paul is the illustration and here you have the account of his conversion on the inside, you have the outside history, the event in **The Acts 9** which is the Damascus Road event. But here we read what was going on- on the inside of Paul. This is the Work that God had done in his life and this is a very good illustration of coming to the end of yourself. Let your eyes go to Verse 3:

- 3** for we are the *true* circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh,
- 4** although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more:
- 5** circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee;
- 6** as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.
- 7** But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.
- 8** More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ,
- 9** and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith,
- 10** that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;
- 11** in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Paul says, "If anyone has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more." If you want to talk about achievements, if you want to talk about accomplishments, look- I'll go to the head of the class, I've accomplished more than any of his peers. He was in his thirties at this time and he lived his whole life with amassing these great accomplishments. Circumcised the eighth day, according to the prescription of the Old Testament, he was of the nation Israel. He had gone through the right ritual, belonged to the right race of people. He was of the tribe of Benjamin. He belonged to a tribe of great privilege, a very exalted tribe. He was a Hebrew of Hebrews, which simply means he was kosher. He kept all the traditions to the very letter. As far as the law was concerned, his passion and devotion to the law was as extreme as existed in Israel.

And Paul was a Pharisee. They were the legalists. They were the extremists. And he went as far as you could go. As to his zeal, zeal for his religion, he was so zealous for the purity and protection of Judaism that he was a persecutor of the church which he saw as an attack on the

truth, as an attack on God, as an attack on the Old Testament. And his passions ran so high that he literally got papers so that he could go places and destroy Christians and throw them in prison. As to the righteousness which is in the law, he was externally blameless.

So this is a man who has amassed all of these personal achievements. This has been done over the whole of his life. He's been spending his life trying to reach this highpoint of religious zeal, morality. And now Christ has saved him.

So what is this approach going to be? I'm a good man, I'm as good as men get? I'm devoted to the truth of Scripture as a man can be? I'm as fastidious about the study of Scripture as a man can be? I'm as passionate about the protection of the truth as a man can be? I've done it all? I've towed the line? I've crossed every "t" and I've dotted every "i"? And now he's met Christ on the Damascus Road, he understands the Gospel and immediately in verse 7 he says,

But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

Whatever things were gained to me, that all went in the asset column, that all went as gain, all his life achieving that, it all was gain, whatever things were gained to me, those things immediately I counted as loss." They went from the asset column to the liability column. They weren't neutral. They weren't limited. They were not noble; they were nothing to take any pride in. All of my accomplishments were nothing more than sinful expressions of my fallen nature to try to earn God's Favor by what I did for myself.

Everything was sin; nothing was valuable; nothing was productive. Like Nicodemus- everything I did put together did not bring me one inch closer to God than a prostitute. But he even goes further than that and says:

whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

Now look again at verse 8:

More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ,

Now that is self-denial. I don't care what it is- no matter what I accomplished before I was saved- it doesn't help at all; it doesn't contribute; it doesn't add anything- but it was all loss; all negative; all destructive; all wrong; all sinful; all stinking rubbish.

You have to look at your whole life- no matter how religious; no matter how zealous; no matter how you kept the tradition of your fathers; no matter how fastidious you were- you look at it all and you say it is all loss. All of it. Everything that is in me is loss. Why is that?

Romans 7:18a

For I know that nothing good dwells in me...

And Paul went even further than this and says, "*Not only is it not good- it's all loss*" and down at the end of verse 8 he says,

I count them but rubbish

The Greek word here is *skubalon*, which means: *rotting human excrement*. That's the grossest word he could find. That's what all human accomplishments are outside of the Grace of God and to the Glory of God- rotting human excrement. Now you can understand what the Prophet Isaiah meant when he said in **Isaiah 64:6:**

... all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment...

Now remember this is not talking about our lust and our lying and our blasphemies and our covetousness and our idolatry and our jealousy and our desire to enact vengeance on our enemies- this is talking about our righteousness- our good deeds- our noble accomplishments- the things we do to impress people and things which make people sit up and take notice.

What Isaiah and Paul are talking about here are the sources of our pride and our confidence. These are the areas for which we take glory and from which we derive self- esteem and human arrogance. Isaiah says and Paul says these things- those good and noble things

that we accomplish in life are *skubalon*- rotting human excrement and in the case of Isaiah- the Prophet says all of these things are filthy garments- which in the Hebrew describes old rotting menstrual cloths.

So those things that bring pride and arrogance to Man; those things that Man uses to try to earn favor with God; and things by which Man tells himself that by accomplishing these things- he deserves to go to heaven over- those things are the things that are rotting human excrement and rotting menstrual cloths and should be looked at as utterly worthless and nothing to take any pride in.

That is the correct understanding of Biblical self-denial. And if you understand that all of our righteousness is filthy garments and all of our accomplishments in life that we take great pride in- and that we use as reasons why God should let us in- if you think about how disgusting and how utterly worthless rotting human excrement is and how utterly disgusting rotting menstrual cloths are- then it is very easy to cast them aside. And there is only one thing that makes all of our human accomplishments that most people take great pride in become utterly disgusting to us- so much so that we are willing to cast them aside with great energy- and that is the surpassing value of Jesus Christ. Read again verse 8:

8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ,

9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,

10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;

11 in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Paul and Isaiah could easily cast aside all of their human accomplishments with no struggle at all- precisely because of the surpassing value of the Lord Jesus Christ. And Paul and Isaiah could count themselves to be blessed by God to be tortured and to die the scandalous death of a martyr because of the surpassing value of Jesus Christ.

You see, when Jesus is excellent- then everything else is not. And when Jesus is glorious- nothing else is. And When Jesus is greater and more beautiful and more important and more valuable than anything else- everything else is just skubalon.

And only one thing makes Jesus to be so surpassing in value and that is Salvation- Sovereign Regeneration where God the Holy Spirit Sovereignly gives dead unworthy sinners- Divine Life. And every single soul who is saved looks at earthly and fleshly and human accomplishments this way. They can't help it- it isn't their fault- God has chosen to reveal His Own Magnificent Glory in the Face of Jesus Christ to them and now everything else is skubalon.

And that is why some people can easily cast everything aside and others cannot. That is why some can cast aside all human accomplishments and others cannot. That is why some can treat their own human initiated righteousness as rotting menstrual cloths and other cling to them as though they were gold.

It is because some have been endued with Power from on High and others have not. It is because some have been loved by the Father to the point where now they love the Father and others do not. It is because some have been chosen from before the foundation of the world to be graciously rescued from the Wrath of God against their sins and others have not. It is because some have been given eyes to see and others are still blind. It is because some have been given ears to hear and others have not. It is because some have been given a heart to believe and others have not. It is because some have been given Saving Faith- while others only believe in themselves. It is because some have experienced the blessed new birth and others have not. It is because some are saved and others are not.

The ability that we have to discard rotting human excrement and rotting menstrual cloths from us in absolute disgust- the ability we have to deny ourselves is predicated on the amount of faith we have in Jesus. Small Jesus- small response. Big Jesus- huge response. All encompassing Jesus- no end to the response.

Our joy at being given the privilege to discard and to be free from all of our rotting human excrement is based on being able to see and possess the surpassing Value of Jesus. But I suggest to you that being able to see and to believe in and to trust in and to possess the surpassing Value of the Lord Jesus Christ takes a faith that is not

inherent in fallen human beings. We must be given a gift- the gift of faith- and that Saving faith- that graciously comes to us by way of a Sovereign Act of God- will grant us the freedom and the honor or seeing our skubalon and hating it and casting far from us with joy and gladness.

The world tells us today that a man's worth is inherent in the things that he possesses and the things that he has accomplished. We honor men who say they have pulled themselves up by their own boot straps and become successful. As fallen creatures- we seek to do things so we can take pride in them and use them as bargaining chips with God. But Jesus says to us that if we would come after Him- if the Spirit of God has opened our eyes to the point where we see our own depravity and our own sinfulness and our inability and unwillingness to love and serve God- if any man will come after Jesus- if any man will enter into Heaven; if any man will be saved- then we are to deny ourselves. So as the world clings to their skubalon; as the world builds vaults to keep their rotting human excrement safe and as they build pedestals to show off their rotting menstrual cloths- we are so blessed to given Saving Faith- so that we are able to cast aside the hideous and disgusting and rotting human accomplishments with great delight- all because we see the surpassing Value of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's pray.