

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

An Expository Study of **The Gospel According to Luke**

Chapter 9- Luke 9:23-26

169- The Characteristics of Saving Faith- Part 3

July 15, 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 I am fully aware that there is great danger in me saying something here today that will give you the wrong idea about Saving Faith or that you might hear something that I didn't say that will give you the wrong idea about Saving Faith. And so I pray that God will give us great Mercy so that I will preach this rightly and that you will hear it rightly.

There is nothing in this Sermon today that should make anyone think or believe that the Christian Life is morbid or dull or simply an exercise of how many things we can get rid of and us sitting on the floor in our living room with no furniture- having no fun and no joy and no hope- awaiting the Lord to return as fast as possible before we are bored to death. That is *not* what this Sermon is about.

There is both a delight and a fear in denying yourself. It is both exhilarating and frightening to even ponder the thought that true and

genuine Salvation brings forth in us the supernatural desire and ability to *not* find joy and peace by indulging in the lusts of our flesh but true joy and true peace is found and savored by *denying* those lusts and by abandoning ourselves to Jesus Christ.

The denial of self is both a liberating and a devastating topic. It is liberating to know that the true fulfillment of Joy cannot be found in *anything* that has been created. All of Creation offers some degree of joy and wonder and we should marvel at God's creation and worship God for it- but we *cannot* and we *must not* even seek to find the fullness of Joy and lasting Peace in *anything* that has been created. That is the classic definition of idolatry and that is the definition having other gods before us.

True Joy is found in God and True Peace is found in God and to know God is to know a Joy and a Peace that cannot be either diminished or enhanced by anything that this world gives and by anything that this world takes away.

And I want to make a profound statement here this morning that I pray will make you think and will be the cause of much discussion and something that I pray will revolutionize the way you look at God and Salvation from here on. Here it is:

We cannot glorify God unless we enjoy God

We *cannot* truly bring God Glory and we *do not* truly bring God any Glory unless and until we come to enjoy God; until we delight ourselves in the Lord; and until His Commandments are no longer grievous to us. We honor God by delighting to do His Will and we glorify the King by finding satisfaction in Him and in loving and serving Him. If Joy and Peace are found in having earthly and material possessions- then make no mistake about it- it is those things that are the source of our Joy and Peace. And that is why so many today- even in the Church- pray so much and so hard to get material possessions and why they are so sad when they lose those things or when they do not acquire those things.

But we must understand that true and lasting Peace is not simply the absence of a war or a conflict and the fullness of Joy does not come to us because we have all that we desire and all is well with our lives. True and lasting Peace and the fullness of Joy transcends this life and

it is better than anything in all of Creation- and I suggest to you that it is true Biblical Salvation that makes Joy and Peace possible. Christians should be the happiest and the most content people on earth. That is why it is so liberating to think that denying self is the pathway to Joy and Peace.

But it is also devastating because lost and fallen Man does not normally or naturally enjoy or delight in God. Lost and fallen Man has no desire at all to be saved or to love and serve God. Man by nature- loves darkness rather than light and he enjoys his sin- and while nobody wants to go to hell- lost and fallen Man would prefer that God just leave him alone.

When Adam and Eve ate of that fruit- their very first reaction to their sin and their nature being transformed into fallen- was that the Man and Woman ran and hid themselves from the Presence of God. And Mankind has been running and hiding from God ever since. And this is what makes Salvation so amazing,

Because if *anyone* is going to glorify God- they must delight themselves in God and if anyone is going to delight himself in God – they must be saved. But if anyone is going to be saved- they must believe and since Man is fallen and *cannot* and *will not* believe- if *anyone* is going to be saved and glorify God- God must Sovereignly grant them with the Gift of Faith. And theologians call this Sovereign gift of Faith- Saving Faith. It is the Faith that saves.

This Friday and Saturday- we are going to have our second Doctrines of Grace Conference. Friday Evening will be at Pastor Joe Tolin's Church in Woolmarket at 5:30pm. Saturday Evening- we will be here. Saturday Morning at 8am- we will have a Men's pre-conference about fighting the good fight against lust and sexual sin at Pastor Joe's Church.

And the subject of our Conference is this very subject- the Radical Ruination of Man because of the Fall. And if you really understand the dilemma that Man is in as he is utterly fallen and if you understand that all the evil of the universe originates from inside of Man; and if you understand that Man is both *incapable* and *unwilling* to do anything about that – by and through his own power or initiative- then you will understand that no lost person is able or willing to suddenly be saved absent a Sovereign intervening by God the Holy Spirit to alter and

change that person on the inside and give him what he does not have or even want.

And so in order to be saved- we must believe and yet we *cannot* believe and we *will not* believe in our lost condition. So **Ephesians 2** teaches us that God must Sovereignly give us the gift of Saving Faith.

And Jesus is teaching us here in this Passage that Saving Faith has certain Characteristics that define it and last week- we spent a good bit of time looking at one of these Characteristics- the concept that genuinely saved people deny themselves and we were looking at what Jesus means in this Passage and what denying ourselves looks like in the 21st Century and this morning I want to continue in that vein.

And I want to suggest to you again this morning that the fullness of Joy and lasting Peace does not come to us by accumulating more of this world's goods but in denying the sinful and selfish urges of our flesh and becoming totally surrendered to the Will and the Words of our Lord Jesus Christ. So rather than denying yourself leading to misery and boredom- the pathway to the fullness of Joy and lasting Peace is not to get everything you want and everything you crave- but in denying yourself.

Now keep in mind as we examine these inspired Words of Jesus that our Lord was not talking to people who were already saved and trying to get them to reach into some higher spiritual place. He was not encouraging already redeemed people in the secret of how to become more fulfilled or more devoted or more committed or more involved or how to bear more fruit or how to become a super duper Christian.

No, Jesus was telling lost people what true genuine Salvation looks like for everybody. He was telling unregenerate souls what it means to be saved; what it means to be born again; what it means to be a true believer; and what it means to be on your way to Heaven. And here Jesus said that the second Characteristic of genuine Saving Faith is that those who have been granted eternal life by Jesus will by God's Grace and through God's Spirit and to God's Glory- deny themselves.

And yet- after 2,000 years of this Truth being found here in Dr. Luke's Gospel Account- we live in one of the most self- absorbed; self-conscious self- gratifying generations that have ever lived. There are countless books and seminars labeled, "self- help" and countless sermons and teachings on the Hay, Wood, and Stubble Television Network which instruct God's people on how to build up their own "self-

esteem" or how to become self- satisfied or self- fulfilled or self- gratified in this life by the accumulation of more of this world's goods. And that flies in the Face of everything that Jesus is teaching here.

Now we have spent two weeks already looking at what Jesus was talking about here in this Passage and we have been examining the characteristics of something called, "Saving Faith". Just what is "Saving Faith" and what does it produce in us?

And we have already looked at two characteristics:

1st Characteristic of Saving Faith- Jesus is Lord

2nd Characteristic of Saving Faith- We Must Deny Ourselves

And I want to continue to look at this second Characteristic today- so let's look again at what Jesus said in **Luke 9:23b**:

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

So the second Characteristic of true genuine Saving Faith is that it produces in all who are saved- a lifestyle of self- denial. Our Lord Jesus Christ teaches here that if any human being wishes to be saved or to go to heaven or to follow Jesus or to come after Jesus- he must deny himself. So the second characteristic of true Biblical saving faith is that it produces in *all* of those to whom God has given it- a desire and an ability to deny himself.

Now keep in mind that we do not earn our Salvation by denying ourselves- that is *not* what Jesus is teaching here. Rather true genuine Saving Faith produces in all of those who receive this marvelous gift- a desire and a drive to deny the self. In other words- Saving Faith produces in us a life that is characteristic of self- *denial* rather than a life that is characteristic of self- *indulgence* or self- *fulfillment* or self- *gratifying*. Which of course is the very opposite of what many are teaching in our day who are in the so-called, "Health; Wealth; and Prosperity Movement.

My biggest concern about the effects of the Prosperity Movement within the modern Church is that it diminishes Christ by making Him less central and less satisfying and less valuable than His Gifts and His Blessings. We need to know that Christ is not magnified most by simply

being the “Giver of Wealth”. He is magnified most by satisfying the soul of those who sacrifice to love others in the Ministry of the Gospel.

When people commend Christ as the One Who makes His followers financially rich- we are in fact glorify riches- and Christ becomes simply a *means* to that end- which is what our carnal fallen flesh craves- health, wealth, prosperity and to be made much of.

But when we commend Christ as the One Who satisfies our soul forever- even when there is no health, wealth, or prosperity- even when all our health and wealth and even our very lives are taken from us- then Christ is magnified as more precious and more valuable and more important than all those gifts and blessings put together.

We see this in **Philippians 1:19-21**. There the Apostle Paul says,

19 for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,

20 according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but *that* with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Honoring Christ happens when we treasure Him so much that verse 21 comes to pass in our lives and dying is actually a “*gain*” to us. Because **Philippians 1:23** teaches that dying means

... to depart and be with Christ for *that* is very much better

This is the missing element in the modern prosperity preaching. The New Testament aims at the Glory of Christ Himself- not the glory of His Gifts and Blessings. And to make that point crystal clear- the entirety of the New Testament puts the Christian life under the banner of something amazing called,

Joyful and Satisfying Self-Denial.

And that is why the Apostle Paul could say in **Galatians 2:20**:

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

And that is why Jesus Himself could say in **Luke 9:23:**

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

So what I want you to hear this morning- is something a little bit deeper and more full than what you heard last week- that Saving Faith not only produces in us a desire and an ability to live a life of self-denial- which by itself is radical enough and almost unheard of- but now we need to go even deeper into this and understand that those who are saved actually find lasting Peace and the fullness of Joy in that life of self- denial.

So even though at first glance- a life of self-denial is a hard road of great suffering and disappointment in this life- in reality- the Bible teaches that it is actually the most joyful of all roads because it is the fruit of being saved and being saved and knowing Jesus and possessing Jesus and Jesus possessing us promises infinitely greater fulfillment and infinitely greater satisfaction and infinitely greater joy than anything this world has to offer. Please turn with me to a very important illustration of what I am talking about from the Lips of our Savior Himself in **Matthew 13:44-46:**

44 "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid *again*; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

45 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls,

46 and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

Now notice here that in opposition to what is being taught in the modern Church- Jesus says here that instead of Christ bringing everything this world has to offer to us through our Salvation- these people are willing to sell everything they have to obtain Christ in Salvation.

But notice that this self-denial does *not* come from a heart of rigid obligation or self- imposed sadness or simply joyless duty- but look closely again at verse 44- where Jesus says,

... and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

Jesus says here that finding Christ as our Treasure makes all other possessions in this life- *joyfully* dispensable- that we can rid ourselves of our earthly treasure to obtain Christ with great joy. The man in this Passage goes and sells all that he has in this life and buys that field for one very important reason:

... from joy...

So the concept here is that selling all that we have or losing all that we have or never having anything to begin with- not for the sake of simply being poor- but for the sake of finding and obtaining and possessing Jesus Christ is the pathway to the fullness of Joy and lasting Peace.

Listen- I do not want prosperity preachers to stop calling people to find maximum Joy and satisfaction in this life. I simply beg them to stop encouraging people to seek for that Joy in earthly and material things and to find it solely in Christ Himself- because the eternal Joy that Christ offers in Salvation is so great and so durable that it enables us to lose our earthly prosperity and our material possessions and even our own lives and still rejoice.

Now perhaps the greatest example of the reality of you and me finding true Joy and lasting Peace- not in the sinful life of self- fulfillment and self- gratification and self- indulgence- but in a life of the self- denial that Jesus talks about here in **Luke 9** anywhere in the Bible is found in **Hebrews 10**- please turn there with me.

Some of you remember that we went over this for several weeks back when we were in our Journey through Hebrews before we started our Journey through Luke and this obscure Passage was foreign to me until I began to go through **Hebrews**. But this passage radically changed my life. And it made me see the folly of what is being taught in the modern Church. And it is found in verses 32-34. Please read with me:

32 But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings,
33 partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated.
34 For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one.

This small feeble little church made up primarily of Jewish converts in the last third of the 1st Century- were truly saved- they had been born from above; they had been transformed and they possessed true genuine Saving Faith. And the reason that I know this to be true is because verse 34 says that they

... accepted joyfully the seizure of your property...

Notice what this says and does *not* say. These people had everything they owned in this life taken away from them- probably by either the wicked Jews or the wicked Romans. All their property was seized from them. But notice that these people didn't simply *endure* the unjust seizure of their earthly possessions. They were not simply brave souls who could muster a smile as they were losing everything in this life. And also notice that they weren't trusting in some insurance company or the Federal Government to replace what they lost. No, the writer of **Hebrews** says here that they accepted the loss of all their earthly possessions- **"Joyfully"** They accepted their loss with joy!

How is this possible? Because of the nature of true Biblical Saving Faith. Because true genuine Saving Faith not only provides the desire and the ability to trust in Jesus for Salvation initially- but it also provides both the desire and the ability to live a life of self- denial. But it doesn't stop there- because true genuine Saving Faith that has the power to initially transform us into believing souls so we can be saved also enables us to find the fullness of Joy and lasting Peace in the Savior- Jesus Christ- to such an extent that losing everything in this life does not diminish that Joy or that Peace in the least. And that is not because we are brave or powerful people- but simply because we have found ourselves lost in the Beauty and the Glory and the Majesty

and the Power of a risen Christ where everything in this life is what the Apostle Paul said last week was *skubalon*- rotting human excrement.

So notice *why* these people could actually be in the fullness of Joy as all their earthly goods were confiscated by evil men- look at the last part of verse 34 again:

... knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one.

It was their knowledge about Christ; their knowledge about Heaven; and their knowledge about true Salvation that empowered them to find joy in this terrible loss. So because they knew- because they didn't wonder or guess or hope- but because they knew- their complete confidence and satisfaction and delight was in the Lord Himself and in the Salvation that God had given to them in forever forgiving them of their sins and of giving them entrance into the Kingdom of God- these people knew that Christ Himself and Heaven itself and Salvation itself was a better possession than *anything* that they lost and they knew that Christ and Heaven and Salvation was a more lasting possession than anything that God blessed them with here on earth. And it was this knowledge that was the engine of their Joy.

The Grace and the Power to believe to be saved continues to work in us to empower us to be joyful through the unjust loss of material prosperity- *that* is the miracle of Salvation. And nobody but genuine believers have this kind of Joy- and that is the Grace and the Power and the Blessing that the prosperity preachers should seek for and talk about rather than the Grace to simply accept and receive material prosperity- which we don't even deserve in the first place and which is only temporary at best.

And this kind of self- denying Power and Love that Jesus says is inherent in Saving Faith- this is what is the salt of the earth and the light of the world. And this kind of self- denying joy is what magnifies Christ alone as being supremely valuable and worthwhile.

So make no mistake about this- dear friends- the Divine Call to true Biblical Salvation is a Divine Call to a life of self-denial. The Call of Christianity and the Call of a true Biblical Church therefore is a Call for you and me to find the Grace and the Power through the gift of Saving Faith to believe and trust that we are able to live with Joy at the loss of all our earthly goods- not because we are brave or stoic- but

precisely because we have received Saving Faith and that Faith has allowed us to believe that knowing and possessing Jesus Christ is infinitely better and infinitely more lasting than anything found on this earth.

Now keep in mind that this is not a race to see how few material possessions we can all have. There have been countless unsaved Hindus and pagan Buddhists all through history who have lived with little or no material wealth. This is also not a Call to see how many bad things we can quit engaging in. It is easy to be against evil. That doesn't take any courage or conviction. It is easy for people to cast aside actions and habits and deeds which the world has deemed to be evil.

No, this is a Call to find such complete satisfaction and such fullness of joy and such absolute contentment in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ through the Salvation that comes by way of Saving Faith that the result is that the Excellency of Christ overshadows any indulging in our fleshly lusts and desires. So true genuine believers live a life of self- denial- and we live that life with joy.

That is what the Apostle Paul talked about over and over and over again all throughout his Epistles- that living a life of self-denial is simply the natural and normal result of possessing Jesus Christ. And that is why Paul could say that everything he had before Jesus- all his accomplishments; all his glory; all his ambitious deeds and actions was nothing but *skubalon*- rotting human excrement.

And that's the only way any of us ever comes to Salvation- because that is the attitude and the heart that Saving Faith produces in us. And it may not be religion and self-righteousness for you- it may be wretched immorality or cheating on your wife or lying or stealing or smoking dope or other forms of corruption.

It may be just that you're consumed with your own importance or your own ability or your own talents or that you are given over to your own promises and pledges to achieve certain things in your own mind in order to reach a certain level of success and self-esteem in this life. Paul said it was all *skubalon*.

Whatever your situation- when God mercifully grants you the gift of Saving Faith- and God draws you to Jesus for Salvation- the first thing that has to be realized is the death of you- the end of your life as you know it. All your hopes and all your dreams and all your ambitions and all your desires melt before the gracious Glory of the Savior and

you surrender everything about yourself- lock and stock and barrel to Jesus and you hold absolutely nothing back.

Salvation is not about God meeting all your wants and desires; it isn't about Jesus jumping out of the bottle to give you your three wishes. No, true Biblical and eternal Salvation is about the death of you. And that is why the Beatitudes in **Matthew 5** starting in verse 3 and following, if you want to enter the Kingdom you start by God Almighty Sovereignly giving you the understanding that you are poor in spirit. What is that? Well, that's the word that means: *spiritually bankrupt*.

Literally it's the word for spiritual poverty that means you are nothing in God's sight but an unworthy wretched beggar- with no plea and absolutely nothing to bring to the table that in any way would make yourself attractive to God.

It doesn't mean you have *little*- it means you have absolutely *nothing* to offer God and it also means that you can't earn anything either- you're spiritually destitute. That is the conviction that Saving Faith brings to every single soul who is going to be saved. And that is why it is then so easy for these people to live a life of self-denial and why it is so hard for unsaved people to do so.

So you realize that whatever you have is nothing. You add it all up and it's zero- Paul said, "it's rubbish" *skubalon*- rotting human excrement- far worse and much less than nothing. So this is the foundation virtue of Saving Faith. This is the Work that God Sovereignly does in the heart of anyone who's going to be saved. The Grace of God brings that individual to a place of understanding his own sinfulness; his own complete spiritual bankruptcy; his own spiritual destitution and that causes the person to be completely desperate to need a Merciful Savior.

So no truly regenerate soul would ever say, *"Well I might like Jesus as my Savior- but I really don't know if I want to have Him as my Lord because I still have things I want to do yet."* People who say that are not saved. Saved people are way past that kind of thinking. We have come to spiritual bankruptcy. Our self-righteous arrogance and rebellion against God has been humbled by the wretchedness of our own sinfulness and we become like that publican in **Luke 18** beating on his breast- so ashamed he can't even look up and saying,

... God, be merciful to me a sinner.

Saving Faith assures that. So all who are truly saved come to Jesus as poor in spirit- you come meek; you come mourning over your sins; you come hungering and thirsting after Righteousness. You're not offering any terms or conditions to Jesus. It is unconditional surrender; it is total capitulation. You come knowing how desperate you are and how doomed you are and how unworthy you are and that is what makes Grace so utterly amazing.

But Saving Faith doesn't stop there. It continues to bring the regenerate soul to a place of knowing how precious Christ's Forgiveness is and how magnanimous His Gift of eternal life is. So you're not about to set any terms or conditions with Jesus. Out of that rotting carcass comes the honey. Out of that death comes the life. We come in the attitude of **Psalm 34:18**,

The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

And it's only when you've literally been crushed in your own self-righteousness and arrogance that you're at the end of yourself. And what is so sad is that today with all our technological achievements- you hear very little preaching that intends to get people to that place of utter humiliation and desperation and helplessness. **Psalm 51:17** says,

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.

God is seeking and saving the crushed and the broken. **Isaiah 66:2**. Who is God looking for?

... To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.

You see, that's the reason the Law was given and that's the reason the Sermon on the Mount was preached. The Law was given in order that it might crush men and crush the normal and natural self-righteousness that is inherent in the Fall. The Law was never given as a moral Standard by which men could achieve their own Salvation by

obeying it. It was given as a Standard by which men would recognize their own spiritual bankruptcy precisely because they can't obey it.

You try to keep the Law and you fail. And you either fail tangibly or you fail in the heart attitude behind the words- but you fail. And when you fail- no matter how hard you try- you become nothing more or less than a transgressor of the Law and a wicked sinner who is doomed to receive the Wrath of God in hell. So what do you do? In our self-righteous arrogance- we still believe that we can save ourselves by what we do for ourselves and so we just try harder and we fail again and we get up earlier and we stay up later and we run faster and at the end of the day- we are nothing but a transgressor of the Law who is doomed to receive the Wrath of God in hell.

So what do people who are doomed to receive the Wrath of God in hell need? What do people need who cannot keep the Law? Do they need more Law? Do they need more rules? No, they need a merciful and gracious Savior- Who will save them because if God doesn't save us – we have no hope. We have absolutely no hope in earning Salvation through our obedience and so we need a Merciful Savior Who will forgive our many sins and rescue us from God's Wrath and then empower us and enable us so that we can keep the Law out of a grateful and thankful and broken and humble heart.

And that's why when you preach the Gospel- you have to preach the Law. You have to slay the arrogance of the sinner. He has to be dead before he can become alive. That's why when we proclaim the Gospel- we've got to emphasize these realities so we don't contribute to the superficiality that dominates the modern Church.

So the Law was given in order that it might be a crushing blow delivered to the head of the sinner- to do great damage to his pride and arrogance and to take away any hope that that person has to trust in himself to earn his own Salvation by what he does for himself.

We must tell them that anyone who can't keep the whole Law in thought, word, and deed 24 hours every day and 7 days every week- is therefore cursed by the Law- **Galatians 3**. And **James 2** says if you break the Law in just one place- you're guilty of breaking the whole Law and you're under the eternal Wrath of God. So the Law crushes us.

And that's the reason the Sermon on the Mount was given and I believe that's the reason the Holy Spirit put it in the New Testament very early on. You're brought in to the Sermon on the Mount and what

does the Sermon on the Mount do? It gives you the Law and it explains the depth of the Law so that it's not just that you don't kill somebody- but that you not hate anyone. That's the same thing. It's not just that you don't commit adultery- but that you don't look and lust. It's not that you just don't steal- you must give. That's the same thing before God.

And through the Sermon on the Mount- Jesus restated the Law and Jesus exposes the people to the Law and says, *"Not only do you not keep the Law on its superficial physical level- but you certainly don't keep it on its deeper level. You're all guilty of violating the Law of God."*

And that's why I tell you that you really don't understand the Gospel until you understand the Law. You can't possibly value and see the glory and the magnificence of the Gospel until you understand the horror of the Law. You can't appreciate the Good News until you are terrified of the Bad News.

That's why preaching can't be some kind of marketing strategy to manipulate people along until they get good and ready to decide they're going to take Jesus into their lives or make a decision for Christ. The preaching of the Law in Evangelism is a crushing, devastating humiliating experience in which the sinner who is brought before the Law of God either rebels even stronger against the Law and runs back to his sin- wanting to get as far away from the exposure of the Law as he possibly can- or God graciously and mercifully brings that soul to a place of understanding that he's completely broken and crushed under the Law at which point he miraculously realizes his own spiritual bankruptcy and he cries out for Forgiveness and Mercy and a Kind Savior.

And at that point of utter desperation- he's not making any bargains with God because he completely understands his own destitution and he realizes that he has nothing in his own life to commend himself to God- nothing of value in all that he's accomplished and God's Saving Faith causes that soul to throw himself upon the Mercy of God- Who alone can provide for him all the heavenly riches that the Word of God speaks of. That's the attitude that Saving Faith brings. You take Christ on His terms- not yours.

The proud sinner is unbent; unbroken; and unbowed and he wants forgiveness and rescue from hell- *but* he doesn't want to love and delight in Jesus and he wants to keep his own pleasures. The proud sinner

wants a form of Salvation- but he wants to keep his own covetousness. The proud sinner wants a form of godliness but he wants to keep his own immorality. The proud sinner wants Christ to heal him and to bless him and to feed him the fish and the loaves and to protect him from harm- He wants Christ the Blessor and Christ the Healer; and Christ the Savior- but he wants nothing to do with Christ the Teacher or Christ the Master or Christ the Lord. The proud sinner wants no part of obeying and serving this Christ to the point of self-denial.

He surely wants Forgiveness and he certainly wants to be rescued from God's Wrath- to be sure- he wants Heaven- absolutely- but he has no intention of denying his own fleshly and carnal lusts and cravings and all I am saying is that a person like that is deceived and not truly born again.

But the broken sinner is so desperate he'll give up *anything* just to have Christ- just to be forgiven and just to taste of eternal life- and he will give it all away in a heartbeat- with absolute joy.

About 450 years ago- the Puritan, Thomas Watson wrote a wonderful book on the Beatitudes and in that book he says,

"A castle that has long been besieged and is ready to be taken will deliver up on any terms to save its life. He whose heart has been a garrison for the devil and has held out long in opposition against Christ, when once God has brought him to poverty of spirit and he sees himself damned without Christ, let God command or require anything and he will simply say, '*Lord, what will You have me to do?*'"

That's the Characteristic of Saving Faith. And that initial Characteristic that brings a sinner to Salvation initially- then transforms and becomes a way of life.

Saving Faith mercifully brings the wicked sinner- who is chained to the railroad tracks- unable to move or get free and hearing the terrifying thunder of the oncoming locomotive of God's Wrath traveling at 300 miles an hour coming just around the corner to devastate you- it brings that person to a place of utter desperation- a place where you have come to the end of yourself- where you are eager to deny self because you trust and you believe in the infinite Value and Worth of Jesus Christ and you also know that there is no value in you at all.

And then once you become a Christian- that same Saving Faith continues to work in you that very same attitude and belief and so denying self becomes a way of life and it becomes as normal and as natural as breathing and eating. So as you grow in the knowledge of God, in the knowledge of Christ- and as you grow in Grace- the roots of self-denial go way down.

Another way to understand this is that growing in Grace is actually growth *downward*- it's growth downward. As you grow in Grace you have a continually lower opinion of yourself that corresponds to an ever increasing opinion of Jesus. You can always spot a person's spiritual maturity by this measurement. Listen to how people describe themselves. If they are always talking about how much power they have and how many "rights in Christ" they have and how good they are and how special they are- then you know that they are not growing in Grace at all and may perhaps not even be saved at all.

Growing in Grace is always down- it is the forming of a lower estimate of ourselves as you draw closer and closer to Jesus. It is a deepening realization of our unworthiness and our absolute absence of any value in proportion to the ever increasing value and worth of the Lord Jesus Christ. Humility and the corresponding desire to live a life of self-denial is a sign of maturity in Jesus Christ.

You just thought you were humbled at the time of your conversion. But as you've walked with the Lord for very long- you should be lower in your own mind and heart than you were then because now you understand much better how deep seated and profound sin truly is because after being a Christian for a while- you've come to the understanding that sin is a part of the fabric of who you are. And yet wonder of wonders- the Lord has chosen to do things through you anyway. So self-denial becomes a life pattern.

So what does Saving Faith do in a soul? What does denial of self actually look like? Here are a few practical things.

- ✓ When you are forgotten or neglected or purposely set aside and you sting and you hurt with the insult of the oversight- but yet your heart is happy and you're content to be counted worthy to suffer for Christ- that's dying to self.

- ✓ When your good is evil spoken of, when your desires are frustrated and your advice is disregarded, and your opinions are ridiculed, and you refuse to let anger rise in your heart or even defend yourself, but take it all in patient, loyal silence- that is dying to self.
- ✓ When you lovingly and patiently bear any disorder, any irregularity, any annoyance, when you can stand face-to-face with foolishness, extravagance, spiritual insensitivity and endure it as Jesus endured it- that is dying to self.
- ✓ When you're content with any food, any offering, any clothes, any climate, any society, any solitude, any interruption by the will of God- that is dying to self.
- ✓ When you never care to refer to yourself or to record your own good works, or seek commendation, when you can truly love to be unknown- that is dying to self.
- ✓ When you see another brother prosper and have his needs met and can honestly rejoice with him in spirit and feel no envy, nor even question God while your own needs are far greater and in desperate circumstances- that is dying to self.
- ✓ When you can receive correction and reproof from one of less stature than yourself and you can humbly submit inwardly as well as outwardly, finding no rebellion or resentment rising up within your heart- that is dying to self.

So, Saving Faith is given by God to those who are elected for Salvation from before the foundation of the world and this Saving Faith draws you to Christ with an attitude of complete unworthiness and you grow down from there. Our self-denial certainly isn't perfect, our self-suicide isn't always perfect- we periodically resurrect our egos and our own wills and thrust them out and intrude into the Will of God and we have to continually seek His Grace and forgiveness when we do that. But in spite of a thousand failures- the truly regenerate soul will not remain there- but will continue to believe and trust and hope and pray and labor and seek and strive and push and struggle to have the denial

of self as the deepest and purest and truest desire and longing and aspiration of our redeemed heart- all to the Glory of God- even though it's far short of what we would want it to be.

Let's pray