

„Vai Jēzus ir aizmidzis tavā laivā?”

"Self-denial, the Queen of All Disciplines"

By Pastor Reimar A. C. Schultze

I call self-denial the queen of all disciplines because without it:

1. We cannot follow Jesus: And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me (Luke 9:23).

2. We cannot make it to heaven for Jesus says: Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven (Matthew 7:21).

So much for the introduction. Let us now expand upon this subject. Self-denial is at the root of all disciplines; in fact, it is the very essence of discipline. Without it there is no discipline. It is best described by Jesus' own words when He found Himself in the deepest agony of His life, in the Garden of Gethsemane: ...not as I will, but as thou wilt (Matthew 26:39). Yes, this is self-denial. Our Lord's whole lifestyle was bound up in this. He restates this principle again by saying: I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which has sent me (John 5:30). Now, knowing what Jesus' daily lifestyle was wrapped around, what is your lifestyle wrapped around, my friend?

This is the way Jesus lived; this is what He died for. It is only by self-denial that His sacrifice availed for our sin. And there is no other way, my friend, for you and me to live, but by "Not my will, but Thy will be done." We must pursue this life without vacation or variation. To live without self-denial is to live without Him.

Unfortunately, the world puts the church to shame in its recognition of the importance of self-denial. In other words, self-denial is highly acclaimed in the world. But it has been hid in a dark closet by much of Christianity. The world knows the following:

- Armies cannot win without it;
- Athletes cannot get trophies without it;
- Businessmen know that they face bankruptcy without it;
- Students cannot enter graduate school without it;
- Pilots cannot fly airplanes without it;
- Employees cannot get promotions without it;

- All the advancements of mankind have come out of it.

The world gives her trophies to the self-deniers, to the disciplined ones. She knows that you cannot conquer without discipline. Paul, the architect of Christian theology, also knew that. Look at one of those passages where he incorporated self-denial in his teachings:

Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air (1Corinthians 9:24-26).

The trophies in God's kingdom are also given to those who stay in the race, to those who say farewell to their self-life in order to win their magnificent crown. Unfortunately most theologians following the great apostle Paul have not emphasized this subject matter. They have driven self-denial out of the church to come up with this scandalous doctrine: "All you have to do is believe." This is a doctrine of getting much for nothing. You will not enter a covenant relationship that way. The result is that there are millions of worshipers who have the form of godliness, but deny the power thereof. They are ashamed of Jesus. They do not witness. They are neither the salt of the earth nor the light of the world. In short, they do not follow Jesus. Nothing has led to more damage in the church and nothing has brought more disgrace upon her than the fact that self-denial has been rejected as an essential element of the Christian faith. We cannot please God without self-denial and doing His will through a life of discipline.

There is a distinction we need to make here my friends, a distinction between faith and self-denial. Faith engages the heart: For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness... (Romans 10:10). Self-denial engages the will. We need our hearts and our will in this business of walking with God. Jesus gave just one prayer to His disciples and that is the Lord's Prayer. It is a short one. In it He says nothing about faith. And why should He? This is a believer's prayer! They already had faith. In this prayer, He talks about self-denial. He essentially says to them and to all believers, "Children, you have faith, but now get into self-denial and do My will!" Pray thy will be done. Forget about your agenda. It is all about His agenda now. That is why you were born into the kingdom. Unless you get this, learning to deny self and doing God's will, you have nothing and you get nowhere with God, neither in this life nor in eternity. Without self-denial, your life will remain spiritually empty.

The people of Capernaum had faith. Jesus did more miracles there than anywhere else, because of their faith. Where there was little faith, Jesus could do little; where there was much faith, He could do much. But because the people of Capernaum did not deny self and repent, Jesus condemned them to hell. You can have faith for miracles. God is not stingy about giving miracles. He is generous. He gives them to sinners and saints alike. The Bible often says: He healed them all. God honors faith. He said He would. But not all miracle workers are His children. Judas did miracles, but he was the son of perdition (John 17:12). Miracles in a church do not mean that her people are spiritual. It is taking up your cross and following Jesus that is spiritual. If you think that you will get a place in heaven by doing your will, you are mistaken. Jesus will say to you: I never knew you, depart from me ye that work iniquity (Matthew 7:23).

Observe also that the Lord's Prayer is where all prayers find their birth. It is also the prayer where all doctrines on walking with God originate. Here we find that thy will, not my will is championed as

both the first and every successive step in following Jesus. Surely self-denial is the fountainhead of discipline; it is getting us on the narrow road where we find joy unspeakable and full of glory. Go for it!

Now this problem of people believing that God is pleased with them without self-denial is as old as Paradise. Remember that Adam and Eve did not become atheists when they were cast out of the garden. They continued to believe. We know that because they taught their sons to believe in God. Adam believed; Eve believed; both Cain and Abel believed. Both worshiped and both sacrificed. But Cain believed without denying self, and chose the easier offering. Abel believed, denied self and received the witness of the Holy Spirit that he was righteous. And he still speaks to us today! (Hebrews 11:4). My friend, if you do God's will, your witness will continue for generations until the end of time. The disobedient believer, Cain, became resentful, angry and a murderer. Every disobedient believer becomes a murderer of everything that God is in. Can you see why Jesus said that once you believe, you must deny self and follow Him? There is no life without it.

God can do nothing with you unless you start to deny self, until you take up your cross daily (continually) to follow Jesus and unless you change your lifestyle to adopt His lifestyle. Oh yes, the church can keep you busy without self-denial, but God can do nothing for you until you let Him be your absolute Sovereign. Disobedience is a criminal act against the King. The disobedient are like wells without water... to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever (2Peter 2:17). Paul says: Mortify [put to death] therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience (Colossians 3:5-6). Most believers will not follow Jesus. Jesus calls them white-washed sepulchers, Paul calls them carcasses before they were buried, Peter calls them spots and blemishes and Jude calls them twice dead. Friend, if you think I have painted the way too narrow, look at Jesus' words: Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able (Luke 13:24).

Faith without obeying and without doing the will of God is devilish faith. The devil also believes, but he will not obey. He has you captive if you believe without obeying.

My friend, make no mistake about it. Although our journey with God begins with faith, it cannot continue without obedience and the first step towards obedience is self-denial.

Finally, take notice, to the degree by which we love Jesus, we will deny self.