

**Mark 8: 34 and 35, Matthew 16: 24 and 25, and Luke 9: 23 and 24;
"The Christian Life of Discipleship", Sermon # 52 in the series -
"Astonished at His Teaching, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on
October 18th, 2009, in the Morning Worship Service.**

These words are a continuation of the strong rebuke which our Lord Jesus gave to one of His most beloved disciples Peter. We saw last week that Peter did not understand the purpose for which the Lord Jesus came into the world. Peter had just before this, declared that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God. He knew that the Father had sent Him into the world to be the great Prophet and King of Israel, but Peter did not understand that Jesus had come into the world in order to suffer as a sacrifice for his sins, and the sins of the whole world. He didn't understand that Jesus must suffer many things. He didn't understand Jesus' work as the High Priest of our faith; the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the World. Peter didn't understand that without Jesus' sufferings there could be no atonement made to God and no redemption made for man. There could be no remission of sins; there could be no new heart to give to fallen sinful men like Peter; and like you and me. Let me begin by asking the question that I asked last week. Have you received the rebuke which Jesus gave to Peter? Do you realize that Jesus Christ had to suffer so that you could be forgiven? If you think that there could have been some other way for your sins to be forgiven, rather than by the sufferings and death of the Lord Jesus; you have fallen right into the hands of Satan, even as Peter did. Satan would like nothing better than for you to think that somehow the salvation of your precious eternal soul could be accomplished in some easier way than Jesus' going to the cross and suffering there in your place. He would like to have you think that somehow you are good enough, as you are, to escape the eternal punishment of hell which awaits all those who do not repent and believe. He would like to have you believe that if you just confess that you believe in Christ in some general way that you will be saved and become a Christian, and will come to have everlasting life. But Jesus did not let Peter get away with that. Rather, Jesus said, "Get behind me Satan," to Peter. When Peter said to Jesus, "Far be it from You, Lord, that this should happen to you;" that You should suffer many things; that You should be rejected; that You should have to be killed; "Lord", he is saying, "I will prevent this if I can." But to have prevented it would have resulted in the disaster of no one being saved; and this Jesus knew full well. This is why he was so strong with Peter. This is why He had to rebuke Peter in the way that He did.

Now, this morning we want to go on to look at the subject of discipleship. For Jesus not only issued a rebuke to Peter, which rebuke is meant to apply also to us here today; but He also declared the requirements which must be met by every person who would desire to come after Him. This includes us here today as well. The overall requirement is that you would come after Him. It is that you would follow Him and walk in His steps. Christian discipleship is the realm that each Christian lives in, moves in, and works in. It is the house that Christ built with His life's work and His life's blood, and without coming after Him and coming to live in

this spiritual realm you will not and you cannot glorify God in the way that He intends. He intends that you and I will live in this house and not in the house of a worldling or an unbeliever. A worldling and an unbeliever will not enter heaven; only true disciples will. This house is the house which Christ was faithful in, and it is the house which He expects you, by His grace, to be moving about in and to be faithful in; He has taken you as His companion and His friend. This morning I want you to come with me, as we walk up the lane and onto the porch of the house of Christian discipleship. He has appointed me to be your tour guide today. I want you come and sit down with me in a rocker for a few minutes and look at the landscape. And then, after we sit there and think about these things for awhile, I will have you follow me as I open the front door and ask you to come with me further; to come with me to see the rest of the house. I will hold open the front door and I am hoping that you will come with me as we have a look into the living room. We won't be able to go through all the rooms of the house now, for there are too many for a complete description in this sermon. It is a substantial house with a number of rooms and in each of the rooms we want to take our time looking at what we are doing in them and with them. God helping me, you shall see them all and have by the end of the tour a good understanding of what this house is like. If there are those of you here who would be Christ's faithful followers from the moment that you are converted, to the end of your days here upon the earth, you must first take a look, and then enter. The first area; what I am calling the porch of the Christian life of discipleship, is your desires. If you would be Christ's faithful follower, you must have a desire to come after Him or you will never enter the house. The second area we will look at, which is the living room of Christian discipleship is Self-denial. It is sometimes called the family room as well. It is your Lord's expectation and challenge to you personally; that you must deny yourself to become His disciple, and also to continue on as His disciple all your days. That is where you will live a good portion of your life and spend much time as a disciple; in this room. And then there are other rooms that we will want to look at in coming weeks. There is a parlor and a kitchen and a dining room and upstairs bedrooms; an exercise room, a bathroom and a basement. We will with the help of Christ's Spirit we look at all these rooms in the future in relation to Christian Discipleship.

So, First, in order that you might know that you are His true disciple, He calls you to think about what you desire to do, in relation to Him. (Verse 34a and 35 of Mark 8)

It is always good when thinking about the Christian life to sit down and count the cost. Our Lord Jesus Christ, knowing that we were paupers, spiritually speaking, undertook to spend everything necessary for you to have a fine spiritual and eternal home to live in, so that while you are here upon the earth, you will learn what it means to be His disciple. But, as we saw with Peter last week, we are not always personally aware of how much it really did cost; that he suffered being misunderstood, rejected, despised by other men, cruelly treated, falsely tried and convicted; and then sentenced to being nailed to the cross for saying that He was the

Son of God; which He was. Do you see yonder cross? "On a hill far away (over that way) stands an old rugged cross; the emblem of suffering and shame." I have read the records of this old place, and I am told that when Jesus was upon the cross, He had to drink the Father's cup of wrath; there He bore the sins of everyone who would believe in Him; and there He died. This is what enables any man or woman or young person or child, to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. You and I don't like to think about our Lord Jesus having to have suffered for us, but as we sit here let us think about what His sufferings purchased for us. To be a true disciple (a faithful follower) of Jesus Christ is to be a true Christian. There is no difference between the two terms. We know this from Acts Chapter 11, verse 26. It says this: "So it was that for a whole year Paul and Barnabas assembled with the church and taught a great many people." "And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch." There is a mention made in the Scripture of disciples who "went back from following Him, and they followed Him no more." But that is because they were tested and they found that they did not really want to learn to be Christ's disciple. (John 6: 66) They didn't really desire to learn His way when they realized that it involved suffering. They did not want to pick up the cross. They didn't really understand or want to understand His words. If you are a true Christian, you are a disciple. And you will pick up your cross. And you will pick it up even if you don't understand all of the implications of everything He said, at first. But when you do pick up your cross, when you become a disciple, it is something that you will freely and willingly choose to do. A disciple of Jesus Christ is His follower; they are a learner of what He teaches; they are a believer in what He came to do for them on the cross. And over time they will become doers of all that He requires of them by His grace. A person does not become a true disciple of Jesus Christ by any way except by faith in what Jesus did at the cross. When you believe in Jesus Christ, and take Him to be your Savior and Lord, you are coming through the narrow gate which leads to this house of discipleship. And having come through that gate, you then come up a lane and you see the porch that we are sitting on now. You are on the path of righteousness which leads to glory and a crown, if indeed you are willing to suffer with Christ. When you first came to Christ, you had to, by the power of the Holy Spirit, learn what the gospel was. Someone preached it to you, or shared it with you. And you had to respond to that gospel of Jesus' having to go to the cross for you. You did that, and you came through the narrow gate; you came through entrance to the Lord's kingdom and His domains. And then you learned, if you did not know it before, that in order to come after Christ that you needed to submit to the Apostolic teaching of the Bible and learn to observe all things which Jesus has commanded you. Matthew 28: 19 and 20 says: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

So now here on the porch Christ would have you think about your desires. Hear His word to you. "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but

whoever loses his life for My sake will find it." Let us take notice of the fact that following Christ is related to what your desire is, in relation to Him. The desire to come after Him is placed opposite to your desire to save your life as you have previously lived it to yourself. Do you desire to have Him teach you a better way, and lead you into the knowledge of God and His ways of thinking, and His ways of doing things? Do you have a desire to have God and Christ take your life and use it in His service; or do you only desire to hold on to your own selfish and sinful and Worldly life? Do you really think that in the final analysis that you shall still obtain eternal life by holding on to the past selfish and sinful ways of thinking and doing things? Let me warn you now; many people who profess to be Christians think that they can do that. But Jesus is saying here that this is utterly impossible. You shall not have eternal life, if you continue holding to on to your sinful lusts and pleasures; you cannot be a disciple living to your own supposed greatness and glory. You must by the grace of Christ, come to the place where you desire to lose your present sinful and selfish life in order to come after Him and find His true and holy life. To find His life you must lose your own. This begins with a desire, and that desire leads to deliberate action in the life of a believer in Jesus Christ. This desire is that yearning; that hungering and thirsting after righteousness and holiness and truth that you see in Christ as you read of how He was perfectly righteous and holy in all that He said, and all that He did. You want to follow Him because you want to be like Him. That desire is the desire to have His holy love toward God and man, working so powerfully in your life that you actually begin and continue, and will indeed lose your own life; the life that you once so treasured; that life of worldliness, pride, selfishness, and sensuality. You now see the extreme value of learning to do good works, and learning to think about other people. You have a great desire to manifest the fruit of the Spirit in all of your behavior. Your desire now, is to do God's will from a pure heart and the highest of motives, which is God's glory. This desire is what is placed in the heart of every true Christian when they come to believe in the gospel. It is the desire to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ whatever it takes. "Whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it." What is it that you do when you come to real saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? It is that you believe in the great sacrifice of what He has done in dying on the cross for a sinner like yourself and you receive His finished work of suffering to yourself. But there is something else that you do out of thankfulness for what He has done for you. You come up the lane and onto the porch of your desires. And you knock on the door of true discipleship and the Lord Jesus opens it; and you give your heart and your life to Him. That is your desire. It is to give your heart and life to him. It is now your greatest desire to follow Him; to come after Him; to abide with Him, to learn from Him and live to Him in all that you do and say.

Dear believer; you have been given the Spirit of Christ when you first believed in Him. You need to understand that losing your old life is a joyful thing, so that you will find Christ's. Turn with me to 2 Timothy chapter 1 and you will find a good example of this. Verse 3 says, "I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as

my forefathers did, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day, greatly desiring to see you, being mindful of your tears, that I may be filled with joy, when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also." "Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands." "For God has not give us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind." "Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God." Do you have these kinds of desires, my friends? The Apostle Paul had the constant desire to serve God with a pure conscience. He had the desire to pray day and night for another believer. He greatly desired to see Timothy and he remembered God's working in Timothy's life, giving him a genuine faith. The Apostle was losing his life for Christ. He was not wrapped up in himself, even though he was in prison. He was finding his life there in prison, because he was "the Lord's prisoner". It was men who had put him there, because he preached Christ. But Christ had actually brought him there. He had joy in resting in the will of the Lord. His on-going desire for Timothy was what? That he might prosper in the things of self and the World? No! It was that Timothy would have this same desire that he constantly had; to lose his old life in order to find Christ. It was that Timothy would remember to stir up all the good desires of the Spirit of Christ within him; that He would remember that God had given him different spirit, and He had produced that new life there in his heart. Timothy was afraid that he was losing Paul, the one that he thought that he could never do without. His whole ministry as an evangelist had been in helping Paul, he thought. But Paul is showing Timothy that his ministry was first of all given to him by Christ. Timothy was afraid of suffering. But Paul reminds him of the spirit which God had given him. "God has not given us a spirit of fear"; to fear that we are losing something valuable when we lose our old worldly, selfish, and sinful life. He has not given us a spirit of fear to think that we are losing anything even when our closest friends in the Lord are suffering; if they are suffering for Christ. We are all gaining in a love which cannot be lost, even if we lose our physical life. We who trust in Christ are all gaining a more sound mind in the way that we think about things. God and Christ would never ordain our sufferings as something good for us unless there was something to gain. And that something is the joy of knowing that Christ is being formed in us and God is being glorified in us. And all this is proving that we are genuine disciples and will be rewarded both now and in the life to come with something better than what our holding to our past unbelieving perspectives would bring. Paul exhorts Timothy therefore, not to be ashamed of this new life or how he obtained it. He is mindful of the tears that Timothy had been crying; thinking of the things of the past; realizing how much he needed the Apostle Paul to help him on, to do the work of the ministry. How could he pick up his cross? How could he go on to preach and do the work of an evangelist without Paul being there? Paul was suffering. Paul was in prison. Paul tells him; stir up the desire within you to be conformed to the image of Christ. Stir up the gift that is within you;

the desire to be useful and fruitful to Christ. Stir up the desire to come after Christ and be His servant; not just the servant of other ministers of Christ. Don't be ashamed of the testimony of the Lord, or of me His prisoner," he says, "but join with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God." Join with me in the sufferings; lose your life; boast in what Christ has done for you. Prove His power and love to those who will lose their life and come after Him. These things all come from having the desire that is talked about in our text. Let's get up now, from our rockers and let's go in to see the house.

Now 2ndly - If you would be a true disciple and a faithful follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, you must not only have desire, but you must also deny yourself.

I am opening up the door of the house of discipleship for you now. If you will look across the room, on a plaque over the fireplace is written this saying: "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me." It is the self-denial of Christ that we warm ourselves in front of; it is the fire of His love and His example of His self-denial which keeps our faith lively and in exercise in regard to all that we will do for Him. Self-denial, the Lord Jesus is saying, is absolutely essential to live the life of following Him. When he went to the cross He was saying; "Father, not my will, but thine, be done." He had said that it was His food to do the will of the Father. To accomplish all things concerning our salvation He denied Himself at many points. To be His disciples and become conformed to His image; we must do the same. So let us first try to discern what Biblical self-denial is; and then we must really engage in it. "Self," John Brown says in his Dictionary, "not only denotes one's own person, it also denotes whatever is dear to us." "Self will is a disposition to follow our own fancy and inclinations, in opposition to everything else." He says that, "Men deny themselves when they refuse to depend on their own righteousness as the ground of their hope and confidence before God; or to be led by their own wisdom, or ruled by their own will and affections; or to attempt the performance of good works in their own strength; but they receive Jesus Christ as the free gift of God, for their all in all, and undervalue their own ease, profit, or pleasure, for the sake of Christ." Now this is a good definition in that it links self-denial to our refusing to trust in our own righteousness, but rather trusting in Christ's righteousness alone. It does not link self-denial with what we might do to merit favor with God. You refuse to depend upon your own righteousness to be the basis of your having confidence before God that He accepts you, or that He hears your prayers. Do you deny yourself in this true spiritual way? And then, do you also refuse to be led by your own wisdom? "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not upon your own understanding." "In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths." (Proverbs 3: 5 and 6) This is true self-denial. Wisdom is in Christ and His Word not in your thinking to be wise apart from Him, or apart from His Word. You also refuse to be led by your own your own will and affections. Edward Griffin in his sermon on self-denial says, "What self-denial is, may be easily explained; but to know when we practice it, or when we only deny one desire to

gratify another equally selfish, is a more difficult task." "As a general definition, to deny ourselves is to perform what is crossing to our natural feelings, and what we should not do (what we would not naturally be inclined to), did not duty and benevolence require it." He is saying that self-denial is learning by the grace of Jesus Christ to do what we do, not because our sinful and selfish nature wants it; but because in the Bible we are commanded it, and out of good will and love for others, at Christ's command, we then do go about to engage in good works to help others. We learn this from the example of Jesus Christ. Turn with me to Romans Chapter 15, verse 1, "We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves." "Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification." "For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me." You see, we learn self-denial from the example of Christ and His instructing us in it; in word and deed, how to go about it.

Self-denial is a part of our worship of God. John Calvin in his Institutes, Book 3, Chapter 7 says in the title of that chapter that Self-denial is the summary of the Christian life. He says that "in Self-denial consists the legitimate worship of God." He says, "This is a very important consideration, that we are consecrated and dedicated to God; that we may not hereafter speak, meditate, or do anything but with a view to His glory." "For that which is sacred cannot, without great injustice toward Him be applied to unholy uses." "If we are not our own, but the Lord's, it is manifest both what error we must avoid, and to what end all the actions of our lives are to be directed." "We are not our own; therefore let us not propose it as our end, to seek what may be expedient for us according to the flesh." "We are not our own; therefore let us as far as possible, forget ourselves and all things that are ours." "On the contrary, we are God's; toward Him, therefore, as our only legitimate end, let every part of our lives be directed." "O, how great a proficiency has that man made, who, having been taught that he is not his own, and has taken the sovereignty and government of himself from his own reason, to surrender it to God." Well, that is first look into the living room of the life of Christian Discipleship. I will have more to say to you about the particulars of what self-denial consists of, in our next sermon. But as we close this sermon I want you to turn with me to Galatians Chapter 2 and verse 19. It is absolutely essential to Biblical self-denial; the self-denial which is so frequently needing to take place in the Christian life; Luke's gospel says on a daily basis; that we learn whence it comes from and how it takes place to the glory of God. "For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God." "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life that I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me." In order to truly deny yourself you are going to have to die to the law. I do not mean that you no longer think about keeping the commandments of God. A Christian loves God's law and meditates upon it day and night in order to do according to all that is commanded of him. No, if you love Christ, you will go about to keep the commandments of God. They are the rules for how you should be living

your life. But having come through the narrow gate and up the lane to the porch of this house and in the front door of discipleship, you will need to understand the fundamental and foundational principle of self-denial and living to the glory of God. It is no longer you that live, but Christ who lives in you. When you first trusted in Christ, you experienced a death to sin which His grace worked into your heart. If you are wise, you will now enter in to this new principle by agreeing with it in the way that you go about to live your life. You are not a legalist. You have died to the law. The "I" principle of doing things; is no longer the ruling principle of your life. You don't look at the law and now say, "I can do that." You say, "How would Christ do this; how would He have me keep this commandment so that God could be glorified, and I not be seeking the praise?" You are in a different sphere. You are in a new house. Christ has fulfilled the law; filled it up with His righteousness. No man will ever even come to close to doing that. You fully believe that He is the end of the law of righteousness for everyone who believes. Salvation is not by works but by grace through faith and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God. You have been crucified with Christ. You are coming after Him. You are following Him. He is teaching you a new and living way. When you come into any situation which requires you to deny yourself, you should remember that you are crucified with Christ. The self-principle, your having to have things easy, convenient, pleasing to you, with no pain, no sorrow, no loss; your trying to become more holy and loving and engaging in good works; in all of these things it is the life of Christ in you; His living in you that gives you the grace to do what is right from the right motives and in the right way; to be able to bear up, and even to rejoice in your keeping His commandments. Your denying yourself in order to do His will; your learning to share in His sufferings as the consequence of doing it, and your having joy in the midst of it, all this comes from Christ. Righteousness does not come through the law, neither does the strength to deny yourself. It comes through Jesus Christ. Christ lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God. That's how God is glorified by each and every Christian.