

REGENERATION & SELF-DENIAL
(YOU CAN'T UNDERSTAND THE LATER UNLESS YOU UNDERSTAND THE FORMER)

Ezekiel 36:22-27; Matthew 13:44
Paul Washer

Posted by Grace Community Church in San Antonio, TX (www.gccsatx.com)

Open up your Bible to Matthew 13, verse 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. Again, the kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.*

Let's pray.

Father, I come before You in the name of Your Son, Jesus Christ, and I know that You hear me. Lord, this day, I am weak and I'm trembling. Lord, You've given me a great privilege to be here in front of brothers and sisters far more advanced than me. In weakness, show Yourself to be very strong with the foolish and the untaught. Show Yourself to be wise. Help us this day. Let this not be a vain exercise. So much preaching, so many words. Lord, I would rather keep my eyes closed and throw rocks at Your door until You answer. Rend the Heavens and come down. Show Yourself mighty. Bring reformation and revival. Make Your bride glorious. Help her. Help her. Help the men to whom you have entrusted her to take good care of her. Lead us in a way everlasting. Make us wise scribes. Bring forth good things from old and new. Put it in all our hearts to present her to you a spotless bride. I would rather stay here. Lord, help me. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Before I get started, I have to tell you that I feel almost just speechless. This is not drama. I fear God too much to use drama with you, but I have labored for the last week over what I am to say. I have labored and labored and written and torn up what I have written, even until last night. Last night at 11 after a meeting, I went to my study, and my wife came in and she said, "What's this all about? I thought you were going to bed."

I said, "No, I've accomplished nothing with what I'm supposed to say. Absolutely nothing."

She said, "Well, I'll see you in the morning."

You see, I'm to teach on self-denial, but there are so many things in Scripture that you cannot teach because there are so many other things that they must be built upon, and so many of the foundations have fallen. So many of the columns around us have been smashed and destroyed that it's almost like where do you begin? Where do I even start? Where do I even start? Self-denial. How do you teach it?

And as I was listening to my brother preach...never heard him preach before...and he kept saying a word over and over that's the same word that kept coming for weeks to me, and I was going, Lord, how can I teach on self-denial unless they understand this one doctrine? How can we even begin to share self-denial with all the churches in this nation if they first do not understand a primary doctrine that they no longer understand because the pastors do not understand it, and that's the doctrine of regeneration.

And then as I was sitting there, and my dear brother said, "Now, I know that I'm not supposed to speak on regeneration, but it's all about regeneration."

I said, "Yes, yes." I want to just briefly look at this passage so that no one can say that I didn't speak on self-denial, but then I want us to look at something, and especially you young men, if you can grasp this truth, it will empower your life, empower your ministry, empower your preaching. You see, young men, listen to me. There is a reformation going on in this country. There is a real reformation. I'm not talking about the church growth, six flags over Jesus entertainment type of reformation or revival. I'm not talking about the media, charismatic type of revival, but I travel all over this country. I travel all over the world. I visit many universities, and I am seeing quite an amazing thing that, even in secular universities when I go there to speak, I see a hundred, a hundred and fifty young men and women reading Edwards and Spurgeon and, more importantly, the apostle Paul and reading him rightly.

There is a reformation occurring and God has done it, and He will do it, but there are certain doctrines that are key if we are going to see a reformation and a revival. And if it is to be sustained, it will be sustained not by zeal but by truth. And not just by truth, but Spirit-empowered truth. Biblical terminology with biblical definitions applied and empowered by the Holy Spirit is vibrant Christianity. Biblical terminology with biblical definitions without the application and power of the Holy Spirit is nothing more than dead orthodoxy and intellectual Calvinism, which is a demon in itself.

And then biblical terminology without biblical definitions is basically traditional church in America. And that always leads to the fourth stage, and what is that? Abandoning all biblical terminology and going to church-growth methodologies to build something that is not a church. And so young men, I'm going to be speaking to you. I'm going to be speaking to the young men primarily, but to the old, because we all need to hear this, and it is this. We need truth. But the truth has to be more than just factual evidence in a book. It is more than propositional. It is empowered by the Holy Spirit. It must become a reality in your life, a reality of the cross, a reality of the resurrection, a reality of the power of the Holy Spirit and the presence of God, because, until it becomes a reality, you're nothing more than a little boy parrot who says all the right things and doesn't have a clue what he's talking about.

And so, in this text, the one thing that I want to point out that has so much to do with it...just look at this for a moment. Verse 44: *The kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field which a man found and hid again and from joy over it, goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.* That absolutely destroys our Catholic idea of piety and self-denial, and it also destroys many fundamentalist ideas of self-denial and piety.

You see, we have this sort of idea because most people in churches today are unconverted and grudgingly do righteousness and grudgingly let go of wickedness. We have this idea that self-denial is a sinful creature letting go of the wicked things he loves and embracing the righteous things he hates in order to save his own skin.

But self-denial, what it truly is, is this....and I've written it down. It's the reality of a new creature, simply living out what he has become through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, living according to his new nature, doing the righteous deeds that he now loves, and putting off the sinful deeds of the fallen unregenerate flesh which he now hates. It is the willing and joyful response of the regenerate man whose mind has grasped something of God's glory, something of the worth of Christ's sacrifice and something of the greatness of the salvation that has been so freely given to him.

So we are not talking in self-denial about this grudging, horrid, popish type of thing, but this thing of a new creature who has been transformed by the power of God, has been given a new heart that loves and desires righteousness, has been given spiritual eyes so that when, first of all after being regenerate, opens those eyes and sees the beauty and the wonder of Christ, desires Him, and is irresistibly drawn to Him. I'm talking about a Gospel with power, a Gospel of power, and when you believe in a Gospel of power and the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, you no longer have to depend upon the arm of the flesh and all the silly little travesties and Ferris wheels that are built in the name of Jesus in order to attract people. It is not just a Gospel of truth, but a Gospel of power.

Now, I want to really not sure where I want to go. There are so many passages that deal with this, but I want us to go to the book of Ezekiel for a moment. And in this book, we're going to find something that has a great deal to do with self-denial. Ezekiel chapter 36. Born again-ism. I have a friend who has written a tract called "Born Again-ism." Everybody in America is born again, and the reason why they're born again is because of most of the preachers and pastors who do not understand the Gospel nor the power of the Gospel and that we've reduced the Gospel down to four spiritual laws and five things God wants you to know. We have done the very same thing that Catholicism has done since its beginning—turned salvation into nothing more than a few little steps and a superstitious prayer at the end, turned salvation into nothing more than a mere human decision whereby a man decides for himself simply to jump out of the line going into Hell in order to jump into the line going to Heaven.

But when you grasp the power of regeneration, everything else begins to fall in place and until you grasp the power of regeneration, you cannot understand the doctrine and the calling to self-denial. Let me just give you an example of this before we read Ezekiel....another little definition I've written about man. Man is a fallen, radically depraved, spiritually dead, morally corrupt, sin-loving, God-hating creature. In the very core of his being, he is as opposed to God as the devil himself. He cannot change and has no desire to do so. He loves a lie and will do everything in his power to restrain and suppress any and every truth about God and the more he knows about God, the more he hates Him, because God is righteous and man is evil.

Now, how do you take something like that, how do you expect a creature like that to all of a sudden hear a Gospel message of self-denial and turn his back on absolutely everything he is and

at all cost follow the Christ? How can you expect a man to take a journey of a thousand miles if he's neither willing nor able to take the first step? And this idea of, well, as the brother put it, "Well, let's get them saved and then gradually introduce them to salvation and to discipleship and to the call to self-denial." But I want to tell you something. It is not any easier to coax a dead man to take one step than it is to coax him to take a million. If he's dead, he's dead. And within that is found the power of regeneration.

Because I, as a preacher, an itinerant, nothing, little preacher, because of my belief in the power of the Gospel and the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, I can look at the most defiled man on the face of the earth and tell him to forsake his mother, his father, his lands, his home, his own life, and I can expect that, out of the group of them, somebody's coming out. I do not have to lay down the bar on the Gospel. I can bid men to come and die from the very moment I speak with them because I believe in the power of resurrection. Someone says, "How can you expect a man to do that?"

I say, "Well, let me answer that with another question. How can Ezekiel command bones to live? And how can Jesus cry out to a dead man and tell him to come forth?" Because salvation is not just some mere, tiny, puny, human decision. It is the supernatural work of God. I would submit to you that there is more power revealed in the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in the life of one sinner than all the power revealed in the six days of Creation. We need to believe that; then, we don't have to succumb to trickery and device. We're not looking for missionaries. I see all kinds of boys go in front of me. I want one man who'll take one open Bible, walk out in the middle of the town square, and preach until they kill him or someone comes out of there born again, because that's all that's required. The truth. The more we fill our lives up with all sorts of silly things, the less God's power is going to be revealed in our lives.

Now, let's look in Ezekiel 36 and just see the magnificence of this and how a man can embrace self-denial. In verse 22 of chapter 36: *Therefore say to the house of Israel, "Thus says the Lord GOD, 'It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went.'"*

I don't know. It seems to me God has....I don't know if it's a sense of humor. I don't know what you would call it, or He just likes to make me cringe. I don't know why He does this, but I preach in so many places, and before I get up to preach, there's always some lady who stands up and sings a song that asks this question: "I can't figure out why God saved me. What inherent worth did God ever see in me?"

And I'm like a little boy in class in the back of the church, going, "Oh, pick me. I'll tell you." And I have to go up to the platform every time and I have to go, "Well, let me share with you exactly why God saved you. It had absolutely nothing to do with you. He saw no inherent worth in you and the only thing you could have ever motivated a holy and righteous God to do was condemn your soul in the very deepest pit of Hell. God has saved you for His own name and for His own glory and a demonstration of his own power.

But don't forget this, my Calvinistic brethren. He has also saved because He is love. He is love. Don't ever forget that. Know that love is not pulled forth from Him by some inherent worth

found in Creation, but He is love and He saves because He's love. Oh, what a wonderful doctrine that is, that it is not just in the sense of His own glory, His own name. It's become a very popular thing to say in conferences such as this, and I glory in it because it's true. But never forget...He is the God of love, and He saves men.

But I want you to look at something that's very important. When He says, *I'm about to act... I'm about to act for my holy name.* And then if you go down to verse 23: *I will vindicate the holiness of my great name which has been profaned among the nations which you have profaned in their midst. Why? Then the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when I prove myself holy among you in their sight.* He says, I am going to do a work of salvation, and it will be so great in you that even the pagan unbelieving nations will recognize that something supernatural has happened here, that I am God.

Do you realize that God could have saved Israel from Egypt just like that, but plague after plague after plague. Why? He brought forth some of those Egyptians. He proved to Egypt He was God. When God truly does a work of salvation, genuine conversion in the life of a man, although we should not expect the unbelieving world to see it and understand it in its fullness, we should expect them to misinterpret it, but we should expect them to see something they cannot explain. But because of the preaching in America, the name of God has been blasphemed among the Gentiles because we popishly declare unregenerate people to be saved. They live like hellions, and then the unbelieving world looks at us and says, "Where's the power of your God? You're a laughing stock." A laughing stock.

You see, we're talking about doctrines. Not just doctrines with regard to soteriology, but doctrines with regard to the church. It is so important. Church discipline is not for the sake of... simply, it's not just for the sake of bringing back a straying sheep. It is for the sake of God's glory. It is for His name. It is to present before the nations a demonstration of the power of God through a converted church, through a regenerate group of people. As pastors, listen to me, you should care for your sheep because you love your sheep, but you should guard your sheep because of God's reputation. It was Paul's desire to present that church a beautiful virgin. It was his life. It was his life's work. Folks, this is about people, but it is not primarily about people. It is primarily about God and His reputation and His fame among the nations.

Let me give you an example. In Numbers 14, after the spies and everything that happened, God tests Moses and by His grace, He upholds Moses, but He tests him. He says, "Moses," basically, "get back. I'm going to destroy them all. I'll make a people out of you."

And Moses' intercession is, "No, Lord, You can't do that, because Your enemies will say that, although You were able to bring them out of the land of Egypt, You were not able to bring them into their own land."

And I submit to you that's exactly what's happening in America today. God got them saved, but God can't do nothing else with them. God can save them from Hell, but he can't save them from the power of sin. I remember... I had the privilege of sitting under Leonard Ravenhill, and I can remember him saying things like, "So, you've been saved. Saved from what? Have you been

saved from lust? Have you been saved from greed? Have you been saved from pride? Have you been saved from immorality? From what have you been saved?"

So much of Baptist theology is nothing more than reactionary, a reactionary movement against heresy, but it becomes a heresy in itself. We're so quick to defend the doctrine of justification that we destroy the doctrine of justification, because, if you have the doctrine of justification without the doctrine of regeneration, you have nothing. The same God who has the power to justify wicked men because His own Son died in their law place under His wrath, that same God has the power to regenerate a heart and make a man not only be a new creature but act like one.

Now, in verse 24, look what He says. *For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land.* This is foundational to self-denial. You see that? It's God. Our brother labored long to talk about our duty, and it is hard. It's a two-sided coin. Both sides must be kept in their place or you warp both of them. You speak about God and God's work in that. It's the same thing here.

Look at this passage. I love this passage. Verse 24. Now, I'm going to put emphasis on the personal pronoun *I*. *For I will take you from the nations; I will gather you from the lands, and I will bring you into your own land.* Verse 25. *Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and I will give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and I will cause you to walk in my statutes, and you will be careful to observe my ordinances.*

Do you recognize a pattern there? Salvation is all about the work of God demonstrating the glory of God, and that is why men such as ourselves should guard it so severely and preach it so carefully, because it's all about God and His name, that His name be great among the nations. *Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done.*

When you no longer have regeneration in preaching, you have nothing. Nothing. He says, *For I will gather you from the nations.* Separation. Separation. *I will take you out of there, and I will do it with a strong hand.*

If there is no work of separation in your life, recognizable at any point in time, you're lost. You say, "Oh, Brother Paul, if I say that, they'll kill me." Then, die!

"I'll lose my home." Then, lose your home.

"It'll cost me." Then, make the payment. Don't tell me about that. How many Calvinists do we have? How many men who have good theology but they are too cowardly to preach it? "Because it'll get me in trouble." What do you expect it to do? All the ones who have gone before us, their blood they shed. You're preaching to a largely unregenerate church body. What do you expect them to do to you? But how is it going to change except we suffer?

I was preaching at no small school several years ago, and a genuine revival broke out, so they tell me. I am never allowed to be back in that school again. And someone asked me about it. They said, "I don't understand."

I said, "This is what you've got to understand. Men are too civilized to want revival. They are too proper to want revival. They want everything pretty and clean, and they'll never get revival, because when revival comes, it's going to rip everything apart, including us."

The worst thing that ever happened to a preacher is that he becomes civilized. It's worthless. Worthless. One thing I noticed about Leonard Ravenhill, and I'd take a Leonard Ravenhill over 20 dead Calvinists. One thing I noticed about Leonard Ravenhill, he was dangerous. He was dangerous. We are to be men of love, men with towels, men who weep, men who serve, but we are to be dangerous about truth.

Do you really expect to get out of this unscathed? Without any scars? Just read Howell Harris, Daniel Rowlands, Whitfield, the two Wesley boys, even Edwards himself. Look what it cost. And it's the same thing in their day that it is in ours. Do you see that? What was going on? I'll tell you what was going on? If you've been baptized as an infant, you're in the church. Even though you're unregenerate, you're in the church. You're in the church. You got in. Why? Because you went through some manmade superstitious thing. Southern Baptists are no different. It's just we don't have infant baptism. We have that silly superstitious prayer at the end of a Roman road that sends more people to Hell than every brothel in this country. It's true. It's true. It's true.

Look what we do. Just look. It's no different than the Jehovah Witnesses or something. We deal with a man. We say, "Do you know you're a sinner?" And usually, we ask him like this. "Now, you know all of us are sinners." My mother has been diagnosed with cancer. That's like the doctor walking in a few months ago and going, "You know, Barb, you've got cancer."

Do we tarry not in the presence of God so to have His fear upon us? You tell a man, "You know, the Bible says that you've sinned." And if he says, "Yes, I know I'm a sinner," then we go through the next evangelical hoop for him to jump through. Well, he knows he's a sinner; now, let's go to the next question. Well, let me just put this by you. You go talk to the devil sometime and ask him if he knows he's a sinner or not. He'll say, "Why, yes, I am. Thank you very much."

You see, the question is not whether or not this man recognizes he is a sinner. The question is this: "While I have been sharing the Gospel with you, has the power of God so regenerated your heart that you now hate the sin you once loved?" And then if they say, "Yes, I know I'm a sinner," then we say, "Well, would you like to go to Heaven?" Have you ever had anybody go, "Why, no, I'd just rather go to Hell." Everybody wants to go to Heaven; don't you realize that? Absolutely everybody wants to go to Heaven. They just don't want God to be there when they get there. Men love Heaven; they don't have a problem with Heaven; it's God they hate. And so the question is not, "Do you want to go to Heaven?" The question is this: The God that you have hated, ignored, despised, show no thankfulness toward, has He so worked in your heart that now you esteem Him and desire Him? The Christ Who shed His blood for the souls of men.

Has God done such a work in your heart that He's now precious to you? If we get them to say that they're a sinner, and we get them to say they want to go to Heaven, then we ask them this question: "Well, would you like to pray and ask Jesus Christ to come into your heart?"

You know, I just don't see anywhere...I use satire because the prophets used satire. It's a biblical thing to do, but I just don't see anywhere where Jesus walks up and says, "You know, the time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God is at hand. Now, does anyone want to ask Me into their heart? I'm standing out here all day, and there's no door handle on the outside. If it's going to get opened, you're going to be..." Jesus Christ owns the door. If He wants to knock it down, He will. You see, it's just got to the point of absurdity. You could do a comedy on this.

And many foreign brothers in the countries in which I preach and travel make so much fun of American evangelicals and Southern Baptists and say, "Oh, God, please never send them here." But it is a call to repentance and to faith and to maybe have to work with a person. You know, I have preached the Gospel to people and seen people seemingly gloriously converted in a moment's time just like that, and they're still walking with Christ. But I have met other people that I have sent home and they have suffered through this thing for months until God revealed to their heart that they were born again.

You see, God is going to do a work of separation and He is going to do it. He is. In the life of every one of His people, as we're going to see here in a moment, He says, *I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and all your idols*. The moment God begins to work in a person's life, He begins separating them, but, listen to me, separating them, not just from a wicked world but separating them to Himself. There are many men in the name of religion who have separated themselves from all manner of vile things and yet they are lost, lost, lost. Because it is not just a question of do you hate that which defiles and that which is wicked. You can do that for pride's sake, but do you love Him?

Let me share with you something about holiness. You want to really mess up somebody really bad, a guy who's preaching on holiness, you want to mess him up, say, "What is your definition of holiness?"

And for the most part, most men will say, "God is without sin. God is pure. There is no evil in Him. There is no darkness."

And then go, "Okay, thank you. That's your definition of holiness?"

"Yes."

"What's your definition of righteousness?"

"God is without sin. God is holy. God is pure."

Well, which is it? Do you realize how much we confuse those two ideas? I would submit to you that holiness does not mean primarily that God is morally pure or that God is light or that God is without sin. Holiness means that God is unique, that there is none like the Lord. There is none

like Him. He is totally and completely separate. I always ask young people, I'll say, "Well, what's more like God—an archangel in the presence of God, worshiping Him in glory and power, or bacteria, floating around in your toilet?"

And they'll always say, "Well, an angel."

I say, "No, neither. An archangel in Heaven is no closer to God than bacteria floating around in your toilet, because there's none like the Lord. He is not like us, just bigger. He is not like us at all."

It is not quantitatively larger. It is qualitatively different. There's none like Him. His name. That is why I always get onto Englishmen who work with me. You're always talking about God and country. That's blasphemy. God and king. Blasphemy. You don't put God in a conjunctive relationship with anyone unless it's the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. What does that have to do with separation? Absolutely everything. To be holy is not to be a little evangelical Pharisee who crosses every *T* and dots every *I* and makes inferences into laws and presses them on everyone else around you.

Holiness is to be separated unto God, to be immersed in God, to be passionate about God, to be wild about God, to think about God, to be God besought, to be consumed by God. That is holiness and everything else breaks forth from that because, if there's any other foundation laid, it's not a proper one. You can do all sorts of things in the name of Christianity and be a million miles away from God and His will.

So this idea, again, of self-denial is not this person grudgingly doing right things in order to go to Heaven. Sometimes, I'll go out visiting with my pastor, and we'll go see somebody that hasn't been in church for months and months and months, and knock on the door and the person will receive us very, very well, be very, very polite. Begin to speak with him about the things of God, and he's automatically drawn to the duties of church, and he says, "You're right. I know I need to get back in church." How many of you have heard that before? "I need to get back in church, and I need to get my kids in Sunday school, and, yeah, I need to read my Bible, and I need to...." He's lost. God is nothing but bad medicine to him that he takes only not to die. If I go home tonight and make it home, my wife's waiting up for me, and she's standing there at the door. And I walk in and I just give her a big old kiss, and she says, "Well, what's all that about?"

And I pull out this, and I say, "Well, on page 32 of the manual of good husbands, it says I'm supposed...." She will feed me that book page by page. She doesn't want that. She wants my heart. When we talk about self-denial, I have never met a missionary, never in my life, worth his salt that's given up almost everything that even thought about it. Never even thought about it. If you were to start talking to them about it, they get uncomfortable and try to change the subject because they can't think of anything they've given up. Why? They're so mesmerized by God. This is not about giving up stuff. It's about looking at Him and following Him.

Now, I want us to go on. He says in verse 25: *And I will sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean.* Look at that. Now, let me just stop here. This is not something that is some sort

of an evangelical second blessing upon spiritual Christians. This is upon everyone called by His name, everyone born in Zion, every child of God. This will be a reality in their life at least to some noticeable degree or they are not a child of God.

Let me stop here. I'm going to get mad now. I am so sick and tired of hearing people say....and everything that's been said here so far, I agree with. I just want you to understand the context. I want you to understand this. I am so tired of people saying, "There's just as much immorality in the church as there is outside of the church. There's just as much divorce in the church as outside of the church. There's just as much homosexuality and lying and hating and everything else in the church as outside the church. That is a damnable lie. The church of Jesus Christ in the United States of America, although she is not perfect, she is broken, and she is humble, she is following her Master. The problem is many of you guys don't even know what the church is.

This is not like Israel, where there was this nation state called forth and then this small group, this small remnant of regenerated people. You forget we're Baptists. It's a regenerate church. It's a converted church. I heard a speaker, well known at least. I don't agree with his form of apologetics, but he stood up a big apologist, and he stood up and goes, "We've got to do something. We've got to do something because 75 percent of the Christian youth in America do not believe that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is important."

And I said, "Sir, if they don't believe the resurrection's important, they're not Christian." It's like the deacon that gets up in the middle of some big carnal warfare in the church and says, "We're Christians. We shouldn't be hating one another." If you're hating one another, you're not Christians.

You see, we've got this idea we just label everybody Christian and then, from then on, it's not about salvation, just the kind of rewards you get. That's not true. That's why you look at people and they'll interpret the parable of Jesus about the two builders and the two foundations, rock and stone. I hear preachers say, "Now, if you're a Christian and you're building upon the rock and the storms of life come, you'll have a stable, good life because your life will be built upon the rock. Well, if you're a Christian and you're not building your life upon the rock, then when the storms of life come, it's going to be hard for you." That's not what that teaches. What that teaches is this.

If you're hearing His Word and obeying and building your life upon the rock, then when the storms of God's judgment come in the consummation of all things, you will stand. And if you are hearing His Word and not obeying it and building your life upon the rock, you will be damned. It's the same thing about all the calls to self-denial from Jesus Christ in the Gospels. We think that He's saying, okay, you become a Christian and then some of you are going to surrender to these calls. No, that's not what He's saying. He says, *If any man come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.*

Now the thing we have to understand is that self-denial and that cross and that following Him takes up many, many manifestations. In some people's lives it is greatly manifested what they are doing. They may die as martyrs or serve on the mission field and not return to their own country for 40 years, like Amy Carmichael. For some of us living in this culture, it's more

difficult to determine just how our self-denial works itself out in the cross that we bear, but it will be nonetheless real, you see.

And He says here, look at this. He says, *I will sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean.* I was raised on a farm and one thing I notice about farm boys is that they've got dirt in every crevice of their body. And I would come in and just be covered in dirt everywhere, playing out on the farm all day. My mother would say, "Go take a bath." One day, I was about nine and I decided I had reached some sort of manhood or autonomy or something. I lost my mind is what really happened. She said, "Go take a bath."

And I said, "I don't think I will." And that was back when it was legal to kill children.

She just looked at me and she said, "You will take a bath." I took a bath. Isn't it amazing that my mother is more sovereign than God.

He's the only God who's Lord of Glory who can't tell anybody to do anything, or He can tell them, but if they don't obey, He can't do anything about that. This impotent God who has no power. My mother would say, "Take a bath," and I would go in there and I'd put a little water on me and get a white towel and the towel would just be black from mud and I would come out with mud dripping off the side of my face, and then my mom would come in there. My mom could haul hay better than any man. She had calluses on her hands. My mom would take to scrubbing me, and when I came out of that bathtub, it was like the Shekinah glory of God coming forth from my body. Because my mother said, "You will be clean."

And look what God is saying, *I will sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean.* Why? "Because this is not about you getting glory from being able to work out your own sanctification. It's about me getting glory by being able to change you and conform you to the image of my dear Son."

And then He goes on. *And I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.* Do you see what a promise that is? You know, all of us have holes in our armor and all of us, when we were saved, many sins seemed to just fall on the wayside and we never seemed to have to deal much with them again. And then some seem to be so rooted and we struggle with them until now. And then sometimes true believers begin to believe, well, this is just something I'm never going to overcome.

Now, when I'm talking about overcoming sin, I'm not talking about sinless perfection, but there is a difference between being a broken, confessing Christian who has victory over besetting sins and then some Christian who's just drowning in besetting sins. He promises you, believer, that He is going to work in your life and cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. And let's just stop here because I know what some of you are thinking.

Yep, when I step over into glory, it's all going to get done. If it's not getting done here, it won't get done there, because you're not going there. We relegate everything to the consummation. We need to be very, very careful. Yes, yes, the day He comes back or the day we go to Him, yes, no more warfare against the flesh. No more warfare. No more failure. No more fightings.

Yes, but that is not to say that there will not be progress. Progress. Go higher up and further in. More like Him. More like Him. More like Him. Striving to be holy. Without holiness, no one will see the Lord. No one.

Someone asked me one time, “Brother Paul, if you could sum up your life,” a young Christian asked me this, “what would you use as a Bible verse?”

And I said, “This. Ezekiel 36:25: *I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.* When I look back on my life of 24 years of limping behind Christ, if I had to use one passage that described His work in me, was breaking me into a million pieces by His providence and working to cleanse me.

I’ll never forget one time. I used to suffer from chronic pain. I’ve had both hips replaced. My wrist has been replaced. They’re going to replace my elbow here. I’ve got more metal in me than a Tonka truck. My arthritis was horrible, and, I remember, I was in Peru and I just came back from the mountains and it was rainy and dreary. And it felt like I was rusted up. And I walked out on this old rooftop of this house in Lima, and it was just a horrid day and I was hurting so bad and I was weeping.

I had just come back into town and a church that we had planted, the Charismatics came in and destroyed it, because in Peru the Baptists evangelize the lost and the Charismatics evangelize the Baptists. The church had been split and destroyed, and I came back and I’m sitting there and just, “God, why? Why?” Typical pity party. “I hurt so bad. The wolves have destroyed everything. Why?” And I didn’t hear a voice and nothing really was impressed upon my heart, but I began to just remember all the times in college and all the times in seminary that me and the other young guys would pass the night praying, something we had no idea what we were saying. “Lord, at any cost, make me like Jesus.”

And it was like the Lord saying, “I’m answering all your prayers. I’m cleansing you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. You want to be mine, right?”

Young men, I tell you. Pray that prayer but know this. You have no idea what you’re praying, and if you did know what you were praying, you wouldn’t have the courage to pray it. It is about being conformed to the image of Christ, so self-denial isn’t for self-denial’s sake. Self-denial is following Christ and desiring to be like Christ, having this attitude in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.

And He goes on and He said, guys, this is what it’s all about, verse 26. *Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.* This is why a radically depraved, God-hating sinner at one moment can hear the Gospel and then in the next moment be ready to abandon everything, even self-preservation, to follow Jesus Christ.

There’s a brother here, Brother Brett, who has a young man in his church, Justin, whom I took to Peru with me one time. The young man was voted most likely to take a life in high school. It was just totally, I mean, criminally insane, this guy. He made a battle ax. He hired a tool and die

maker to make a battle ax for him. I mean, he wasn't right. And he hated God, he hated Christians, he hated everything, and he said that, one night, he's going down a gravel road in an old beat-up truck, he's hanging halfway out the window with his fist clenched at God, screaming at God, blaspheming God, cursing God, and daring God to come down and fight him. He said the next thing he knew, the next conscious thought he had, the truck was off the side of the road. He was down in the floorboard with his hands lifted up to Heaven, worshiping God with such love in his heart that he thought he was going to explode.

Yes, it is not a human decision merely. It is a human decision, but only because there is an eternal decision and a working out of that eternal decree through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. Look what he says here, and this is what people have to understand. We have a statue here—I don't care if it's 20 feet tall—of the strongest man in the world, and it's here and it's made of stone. I can walk up to that statue, I can poke it, I can pick it, I can kick it, I can punch it, I can do absolutely everything, and what's that statue going to do? Absolutely nothing? Why? It's inanimate. It cannot respond to stimuli at all.

You take a man here, the strongest man in St. Louis, I can grab him in certain places and twist hard enough to make him scream like a wildcat. Why? Flesh can respond to stimuli. Men cannot and will not respond to divine stimuli, so how on earth can we call men to a radical self-denial and a following of Jesus Christ? Because we believe that one tiny man with an open Bible proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ that God, through that, will regenerate that man's heart and cause him to come forth from the grave. That's why. That's why.

I am so astounded. Do you realize this was the doctrine, as I've said, of the awakening. This is what Whitfield preached. This is what Edwards preached. This is what Rowlands preached. Howell Harris...this is what they preached. Supernatural. It cannot be manipulated. It cannot be drawn out. It is supernatural. As Calvinists, we ought to be the most supernatural believing people on the face of the earth.

But you know what I've seen in us. We talk a good talk and all that, but when I watch a Calvinist, many times supposedly lead someone to the Lord, they're no different than someone with really bad theology. Really. How's your theology made you any different?

I was about 30 clicks south of Alaska, preaching to the Southern Baptists in Canada. That one, I'll never figure out. And they asked me to come and do a conference and I did it, and then they asked me to come the next year and go around to all the little churches that couldn't come. So I was in this little town 30 clicks south of Alaska. The grizzly bear population, I was told, outnumbered the people population in this town. A man came in...a mountain of a man, right when I was getting up in the pulpit. Sixty, 65 years old. Could have cleaned the clock on 20 men gathered here. He was just a mountain of a man. He was the saddest human being I've ever seen, and I just went to the pulpit. I started preaching the Gospel. I preached. When I finished the Gospel, I went down and I said, "Sir, what's wrong with you?"

He pulled out a manila envelope, and he said, "I'm going to die in three weeks. I've never been afraid of any man. I've lived in the bush. You can only get to the ranch that I work either by riding over the mountains or taking a plane or taking a river raft for so many days down the river.

I have never been to church. I believe there's a God, and one time I heard someone talk about some guy named Jesus, and I'm scared to death."

I said, "Sir, I preached the Gospel to you. You heard it. Did you understand it?"

He said, "Yes, I understood it, but that's all. Anybody could've understood that. But is that it? I'm just to tell you I understood it?"

Most Southern Baptists evangelists would have said, "Yes, sir, that's it. Now, pray the prayer with me," and they would have damned his soul to Hell. We ought to put most of these evangelists on a boat, send them to some island, and sing the doxology as they are departing from the port. No, really, why should I get mad at Jehovah Witnesses who damn people to Hell and not speak about men who do the same in our denomination?

I looked at him and I said, "Well, sir, I've got to fly out of here tomorrow. I'll cancel my flight. We will stay here until the Lord reveals Himself to you or you die." I said, "Let's start." So I started just taking him through the Word. I went through the Word about an hour, talking to him, counseling. I said, "Do you understand what we've gone through?"

He said, "Yes."

And I said, "And? If you'll call upon the name of the Lord, do you want to seek Him?"

He goes, "Look, I'm just..."

So, I said, okay, go through the Word again. See, if you want to get to Denny's and eat, then forget about leading men to Christ, it might take days. So I went through it again, and then the third time around, I say, "Okay, let's just keep praying." And we get to John 3:16 about the twentieth time. I said, "Just read it."

He said, "Okay. *'For God so loved the world that he....'* I'm saved! I'm saved! I'm saved! I have eternal life. My sins are forgiven. I'm saved."

I said, "Sir, how do you know that?"

He said, "Haven't you ever read this verse before?"

You see, what's the point? The point is this. They're people. They're not numbers. They go to Hell when they die if they don't know Christ.

A lady walked up to me in Missouri one time and she said, "I'm lost, I'm lost, I'm lost."

And I don't know why I asked her this. I said, "Well, have you ever asked Jesus to come into your heart?"

She said, "Six times."

I said, “Well, it didn’t do any good, did it.”

She said, “No.” She said, “What should I do?”

I said, “Go home. Go home and cry out to God as though Hell were opening up its mouth to swallow you down. And cry out to God until He tells you He’s saved you.”

She went home and she came back the next evening, looked just horrid. She said, “I cried out to God all night. I fell asleep in total despair. I’m so lost I don’t know what to do. What can I do?”

I said, “You have two options, dear. Keep crying out to God until He saves you, or stop and go to Hell.”

The next night, I was praying with her dad, and she came up there, and he came up there and we were praying, and the music started, so he went back to his seat, and all of a sudden someone plopped down beside me. I looked and opened my eyes, and she said, “I’m saved. I’m saved.”

I said, “What happened?”

She said, “I cried out to God all night and I fell asleep in just total despair, but when I woke up this morning, He shed abroad His love in my heart, and I’m saved!”

Where’s the supernatural God you talk about? You’ve got to give Him a helping hand because He can’t seem to properly save people anymore? If we could fill this place up with old preachers from 150 years ago, they’d be yawning, because they all heard this. It’s all they ever talked about. Remember, we’ve got a formula. We’ve got a methodology. Who was it that said, “A million more in ’54”? Or ’64, whatever it was. We get a million more like what we’ve got and we’re doomed. It’s about conversion. It’s about preachers.

I’m so tired...it’s not about little boys who can speak the words of parrots. It’s about men who dwell in the presence of God. His Word has been burned into the reality of their heart, and they speak forth truth, come Hell or high water.

That’s what brings reformation, and I’ll tell you something, old guys like myself. God’s raising up a bunch of them. He is. Be careful not to become their enemy when they come in and split your church wide open because you wouldn’t do it.

He says in verse.... and I will finish with this, He says, *I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes....* Now there’s an amazing word, isn’t it. *I will put my Spirit within you and cause you—make you—to walk in my statutes....*

Well, God can’t make you do anything. Well, as a matter of fact, He can. He can kill you if He wants to. It’s like a guy one time, an unbeliever, stood up, and a friend of mine, an old guy by

the name of Homer Crain, was sitting beside him. The preacher was up there going, “God wants to take you to Heaven but He can’t do it.”

And this old sinner stood up and said, “Well, if He can’t take me to Heaven, He can’t send me to Hell, and he walked out. He had better theology than most preachers. The fact is, He can take you to Heaven and He can send you to Hell and He’ll get glory out of both of those things. *I will put my Spirit within you.*”

One of the things that frighten me most about some of the young men coming out of our seminaries is there’s a lot of knowledge and not a lot of reality. You see, you take the truths of the Puritans and the early Baptists, but if you don’t go out in the woods on a log and pray until dew has set well on your head, you’re going to be worthless. This is not about learning all you can. I’ve already gotten enough truth I’ll never be able to live out. I’ve seen many Arminians live beyond their theology, but I’ve never met a Calvinist who’s lived up to his.

Listen. This is about the Holy Spirit. This is about the power of the Holy Spirit, and I am not going to allow a bunch of people who twist that doctrine. I am not going to allow them to steal my heritage from me. A Jehovah Witness knocks on my door and says, “We’re Jehovah Witnesses.”

I say, “Well, come on in. So am I.” And after they get through with their spiel, I say, “You lied to me. You’re not a Jehovah’s Witness. Now, sit down. I’m going to tell you the way I real Jehovah Witness talks.”

Someone said, “I’m charismatic.”

I said, “Well, so am I,” because I’m not going to allow the inheritance purchased for me with the blood of Jesus Christ to be taken from me because I’m just afraid someone will misinterpret me. The best thing some of you young boys could do is go out in the woods and don’t come back until you’ve met with God. That’ll be the difference. You can know Him, young man. His presence can be more real to you than any human being sitting in the room with you. That is true.

He says He’ll put His Spirit within us. Look at this. We’ve got all these people that supposedly have the Holy Spirit who live like demons. That’s the fault of bad preaching, bad theology. I always use this illustration for college kids. I always tell them, “What if I showed up here and I’m in my suit and my hair is kind of combed and everything, but I show up an hour late and everyone’s mad at me.”

“Well, didn’t you appreciate the opportunity to get to speak here? Why have you shown up late?”

And I tell them, “Just stop. I was out in the highway and I had a flat tire. I was changing the tire, and a lug nut rolled out into the highway there, and I ran out unthinking, and I went up there and I picked it up and when I stood up there was a logging truck weighing 30 tons, going 120

miles an hour, and it was like five feet in front of me, and it ran me over. That's why I'm late. I'm sorry."

They're going to say, "You're either a liar or you're absolutely insane."

And I say, "Well, why?"

They say, "It's impossible...you can't have an encounter with a logging truck weighing 30 tons, going 120 miles an hour, and not be changed."

Then how can you tell me you've had an encounter with God and not been changed. Has God's power become somewhat diminished over the years so that He can't even rate a hemi anymore.

I pray that God would take this mess that I have put forth and encourage you. We are living in the greatest day. Do you realize that? Men, again, I want to tell you something. I think many of you men will recognize this. I'm 44 years old. My generation almost doesn't even have a clue about what's really going on. God is raising up a lot of young men and men. I can see it everywhere. He's doing it. But we can be mentors. I mean, this is the greatest time to ever be alive. I could have never imagined ten years ago that the Gospel, the doors for the Gospel have been opened up in places that no one could have ever imagined. Are we going to run through it?

Theologically, I mean, it's wonderful what's happening. It's wonderful. And don't think, "Well, I don't know why we are planting churches in Georgia. I mean, there's all kinds of churches in Georgia." No, there's not. There's a lot of red brick buildings with the word, "Ichabod," written across them. There aren't many churches. Stop doing that. You're not a Baptist when you do that. It's a building. It's not the church.

These are the worst of times; these are the greatest of times. Rise up in the power of your God. Take this truth that is so dear to you and preach it even though it gets you killed.

Let's pray.

Father, thank you very much. All hail the power of Jesus' name, that angels prostrate fall. Bring forth the royal diadem and crown Him Lord of all. In the power of the Holy Spirit, Lord, please direct the hearers and everything said correctly. Direct them away from everything of flesh. Help us, Lord. Oh, Lord, do a work in our day. I praise You for the work You've done. I praise You, Lord. I'll not say...I'll not say that You haven't moved because I've seen You move in these last years. Oh, a great work You're doing, Lord, but mercy drops round us are falling but for the showers we plead, oh, God. Send a revival in this land. Send a reformation, Lord. Raise up Your church. Make Thy name glorious. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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