

More of Christ, Less of Me: Part 2

Luke 9:23

Good morning to you. So delightful to be with God's people worshiping, singing, and praising, and then preparing our hearts to come and hear what the Lord has to say.

If you have been with us in our study you know that we have launched on a little bit of an excursion of out **Luke 9:23**, where Jesus says that if you're going to follow Him you must deny yourself, take up your cross, and obey Him, or follow in His ways, follow His paths. And we're taking a few weeks to expand our understanding of what it means to follow Christ.

We already talked about what it means in conversion. In conversion it means that you must come to Him as your only hope and cast off any of your own righteousness. No matter what it might cost in terms of reputation, or earthly things, on the hillside where all kinds of people that professed to desire to follow Christ, they wanted to walk in His ways, and He said to them, "You must then deny yourself. You must then sacrifice everything and follow Me, My path, My ways. I'm your only hope, I'm your master, I'm the voice that you listen to. You're the sheep, you come to the Shepherd."

When you came to Christ, that's what you were saying. "Lord, You are my Master, You're my only hope, I have no hope without You."

And then He said to His disciples, "You're going to suffer. If you're going to follow Me, remember that I'm heading to Jerusalem to suffer, all My people will suffer."

In this life, until glory, there will be pains and trials and difficulties and sufferings and all that goes along with living in a corrupt and fallen world that is hostile to the truth. You will face it if you're going to follow Christ. And so as a Christian, when you come to Christ, you're saying, "He's my Master and my only hope." As you begin then to embark upon a life of following Him, you're in the constant mode of finding out what it means to deny self every day, to take up the death of self, the cross upon which you and your own self-exaltation is crucified, and follow Him.

And so that is what we've been doing. We've been looking at what it means to follow Christ. And we're looking at the practical aspects of specifically what it means to die to ourselves. What does that look like on a daily basis? And let me be clear about something I've already said but it bears repeating. Dying to self isn't an exercise in sheer human willpower. Dying to self is not some sort of exercise on a daily basis in the self-will and willpower to say no to otherwise fleshly or worldly things. Dying to self isn't the idea of grinding out a disciplined life regimen so that at the end of it you feel self-empowered and less guilty about former spiritual laziness. It's not that at all.

Self-denial is actually the polar opposite of self-improvement. It is the polar opposite of self-betterment. Self-improvement is rooted in *self*. True self-denial is rooted and grounded – are you ready for this? – in the love of Christ. It is rooted and grounded in an object of your love. It is rooted and grounded in one simple thing: a love for Christ – listen – that's been poured out in the hearts of all true believers. So says **Romans 5:5**. The Holy Spirit has been given to every believer and He begins at the moment He takes up abode in the believer and within God's people, He begins to pour out a love for Christ, a new inclination, a new affection for Him. **Romans 8** will go on to say that very thing, that no longer do you serve the flesh, but you serve Christ, you serve with your mind the things from above, the things of heaven.

Look for a moment at **2 Corinthians 5:14**, a text we've looked at before, but 2 Corinthians 5:14, as we make our way through more Scriptures. **2 Corinthians 5:14** tells us what it means to be driven, empowered by the love of Christ. **Verse 14:** *"For the love of Christ controls us..."* Why? Because we've *"concluded this* (in other words, we've believed this, this is our conviction) *that one died for all, therefore all died."*

The old life is dead. You don't serve the old life when you come to Christ by faith, the old life has no more dominion, or reign, or power over us. **Verse 15:** *"...and He died for all* (with this purpose) *so that they who live* (that is to say, live by faith in Him) *might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf."*

So we could look at it this way. To deny yourself is to prefer Christ above all things. It is to prefer Christ in all things. It is to prefer Christ for all things. It is to love everything about Christ. It is to love everything He loves and therefore disown everything that you would use to exalt yourself above Him.

And that's why, beloved, that all self-denial, all of it, it can't rise from willpower, it can't rise from ideas of self-betterment, which you then take credit for, it can't rise from a desire to get away from feelings of guilt so that you can therefore empower yourself into a better way of living and sort of become euphorically proud in it. All self-denial must spring from faith in Christ, so that it's the person of Christ, it's the person of Christ, the saving love of Christ revealed at the cross, and the glory of Jesus Christ that begins to swallow up in your life all the self-honor that you typically feed.

We love to sing that song, "Hallelujah! All I have is Christ...Jesus is my life." Fernando Ortega, one of my favorite hymns: "In the morning when I rise, give me Jesus, And when I am alone, give me Jesus, And when I come to die, give me Jesus, You can have all the world, but give me Jesus."

And so we've been beginning this list, I've sort of boiled into a list the practical ways that this love for Christ works itself out and we have more of Christ then and less of us, having worked through these dynamics. Eight practical steps I called them, for living a life that's more of Jesus Christ and less of you and me.

The first was to pray daily. Remember Luke says deny yourself, take up your cross daily. Well, you're going to have to pray daily if you're going to take up your cross daily. What are you praying for? For spiritual understanding. You're praying for spiritual understanding and this results in the death of self-reliance. The death of self-reliance and you remember, last time, I sort of told you that if you pray for spiritual understanding every day, then you are acknowledging certain things that are critical for the death of self. You acknowledge several things when you get up every day and you say, "Lord, I need Your spiritual understanding."

First of all you acknowledge your fallen condition, we saw that and we looked at **John 15:5**, *"Apart from Me you can do nothing."* We said that prayer acknowledges God's grace and mercy in allowing you to know wisdom, right? By His doing you are in Christ Jesus, **1 Corinthians 1:30**, and by His doing Christ became to us wisdom. Prayer acknowledges the Spirit's power then to open your mind to the truth. We saw that last time, **1 Corinthians 2:14**, a natural man neither has the ability nor the desire to embrace the truth by faith, but God's people are not in the natural realm anymore. We've been given the mind of Christ, as a gift. And so when you say, "Lord, give me understanding," you're asking the Spirit of God to open your mind and such begins then the death of self-reliance.

Lastly we said that prayer acknowledges God's patience and His generosity. Sometimes we go through a list like this and as some of you already said to me, we just covered the first two last time, "Oh, I feel so convicted by that." And we were just singing this wonderful song about the grace of Christ that covers even our failures and then the girls were singing that when there's little fruit in our daily walk, what do we do? We wait for the Lord. Why? Because He's generous and He's patient. This is a process, so of course we're going to lay it on thick, of course we're going to open the Word of God and let it have its way and its heaviness in our hearts, but just know that in the grace of Christ, God is generous. And He's patient. And He's working out that which He has begun in His people.

A second thing that we said, the second principle, or step if you will, to the death of self is to orient the daily life toward truth, to orient your life toward truth and this becomes then the death of self-indulgence. **1 Timothy 4:7**, we talked about it last time, *“Discipline [your life] for the purpose of godliness.”* In other words, structure your life on a daily basis in every way so that it encourages and sustains and upholds life patterns that are oriented toward the truth, that make you more godly. And we talked about the fact last time that these words are not just idle words, as Moses told the people of Israel in **Deuteronomy 32**, these words are your life. They are your very life.

I remember a young college group years ago, and they used to have that little saying, “No Bible, no breakfast.” So if you want your physical food, get up in the morning, you want the Word of God coursing through your mind and in your heart as you pray for understanding. Obviously in our culture we have a major problem with loving the truth, which then exposes a major problem with loving Christ, and if you have a major problem with loving Christ, it’s because the Spirit who is trying to pour the grace of the love of Christ out in your heart is being hindered and pushed against.

Why do we push against what we know to be true in His Word? Because after all, we become dull of hearing because we just find these things much less important than what we do in our personal life. We love ourselves, we coddle ourselves, we comfort ourselves, we give ourselves what we want, and this culture doesn’t help, does it? We get no help from this culture. Persecution ought to be very interesting as it rises up. Who will remain in the church, the so-called church in America? Orient your life toward daily truth.

Here’s the third. And I’m not sure we’ll get past this today. Sorry. I mean for those of you who like to go through things quickly, this is going to be like molasses, but just live with it. For those of you who like to spread things out on the table, you’re going to be dancing in the aisles on this.

Number three, and this is a tough one, allow the truth to indict and correct your heart. If you want to die to self, allow the truth to indict and correct your heart. This is the death of self-exaltation. The exaltation of your reason, the exaltation of your opinions, the exaltation of your own will, the exaltation of your ideologies, the exaltation of, you know, the well-crafted excuses that you’ve made through the years for why you won’t do what you should do. Dying to self is difficult because it requires that we allow the truth of Christ to have its way in the inner life. To have its way.

Look at 2 Timothy for a moment, chapter 3. You’ve memorized these verses if you’ve heard them any length of time because it’s such a great passage of Scripture about the divine origin of this written revelation. But notice what it says, and what we often sort of buzz right on by very quickly, **2 Timothy 3:16**: *“All Scripture is inspired by God...”* do not let the word fool you, it’s not a mystical word. *“Pasa graphē theopneustos”* – it is breathed out by God. All Scripture is breathed out by Him. And look at this, it is *“profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.”* We like to go, “Oh, it’s profitable for teaching and training in righteousness.” Don’t miss the two in between. The Scriptures reprove. The Scriptures correct. The Scriptures tear down, the Scriptures build up. The Scriptures expose, and the Scriptures cover. The Scriptures disrupt and the Scriptures renew.

So here’s our challenge. When we hear the truth, we’re faced with how to respond to the truth. Some might hear the truth and not think about it much past that at all. Others might have the habit in their daily life of hearing the truth and getting excited about it at first, maybe even sitting here and affirming it, but you go away and you assume that because there are some things that you’ve done pretty well in your life, you’ve nailed those things and so there’s not much more to do with the truth.

Oh, I’ve heard that passage before.

I’ve heard that taught before.

I’ve memorized that Scripture.

I've done that before.

Oh, we did a study back in BSF in that and it was just awesome and I've got that down, I've learned it.

Or what about if you take notes and you write the truth down and you fill the page with all your intentions? How you're going to apply it and then you have notebooks and Bible leafs filled with notes you never touched.

There's another problem. We sometimes hear the truth and we take immediate offense in our hearts because that truth that's being preached cuts against the grain of some ideas that we've held dear for years and suddenly those ideas are being exposed as error. You do that when you're sitting next to someone and you've waxed eloquent for years about this truth and that truth and suddenly the pastor opens up the Word of God and boom! there it goes, a grenade right in the middle of your little cherished idea. And you don't like it. Why? Because somebody sitting next to you who's going, "Ah ha, see, for years I've been saying I don't know about that." And you're suddenly exposed and you don't like it, so you get easily offended. "Ah, preacher, wears a suit all the time, what's wrong with that?" You're laughing. It happens.

But sometimes our greatest struggle is that when we hear the truth we are tempted to hide from the brightest beams of it because we simply don't want to face the weakness that we've come to cherish. We don't want the Scriptures to indict us. Sometimes we learn something from the Word and it's about to plunder one of our darling idolatries that we hold dear and we just don't want the indictment, so we conveniently tune out what we don't like.

Listen, beloved, if you want more of Christ and less of you, the words must be allowed to penetrate. They must be allowed to expose what's in your mind and your heart, it must be allowed to have its way with your affections, and your convictions, and your will. And I'm not saying it's going to happen as you sit there in one sermon so that fifty minutes later all is good. Sometimes it's going to work you over every day, that same truth haunting you in the patient love of Christ, as the Spirit of God is wanting you to face it.

Scripture exposes wrong thinking, and you've got to change that thinking. Scripture exposes beliefs and convictions that are literally of the world. Scripture shines its truth upon your unholy desires and motivations and suddenly they're there at the surface, it's clear. Maybe no one else around you can see it, but you know the Spirit is just putting that divine halogen right on it. You feel it. Scripture even examines our conduct and gives a right diagnosis. You know, we have conduct and we have lots of ways to hide the heart by saying, "Oh, well, that's this," or "I didn't intend this," or "I didn't mean that."

You know sometimes when you sin against somebody and they say, "Well, you did this,"

"Well, I didn't mean to..."

How do you know? I mean, that's that quick? That quick you know you're intentions? You've got to let the Scriptures diagnose the heart behind certain conduct. Scripture examines the conduct and it diagnoses with piercing clarity the heart behind the action.

In a word, the truth ransacks our hearts, doesn't it? The truth comes to our hearts and it reveals the secret ways we cling to ourselves, rather than to God. In each moment that your heart is exposed, it's right then and there that you have the greatest opportunity to love and prefer the Lord Jesus and begin the process of killing that area and dying to self and knowing Him in a greater way.

So let's put together a few practical examples and work out the implications. What does this look like to let this truth indict and correct these precious things we hold dear? Well, think about this. I'll just give you several. First of all, when the Scriptures declare that no one can be saved by their good deeds, how does your heart respond? When the Scriptures are clear that no amount of human righteousness will ever be good enough, do you allow those arguments in your heart to rise up against God? Do you stir up doubts about the truth and allow them to rise up in your heart about that?

Because to prefer Christ and die to self is to humble your heart under that indicting truth. And no matter how much your flesh might argue that, “Well, certainly God has to validate some of the goodness in mankind, I mean there’s Mother Teresa and there’s people who serve others all their life and then there’s the people that rally around disasters and news reports, look at how compassionate people are, surely that can’t mean nothing to God.” Instead of your flesh being allowed course you need to resist that false idea because the Scriptures say that no righteousness of any man will ever justify a man before God, **Romans 3**.

Clearly you will never be saved by works. Does your heart rail against that? You’ve got to resist that false idea and die to your ideology. You’ve got to call it out for the hell-spawned idea that it is. It’s from the pit. Satan has used that ideology that man can gain some merit before God, he’s used that ideology to hold in bondage multi-generations of people. You’ve got to embrace Scripture in humble faith.

Or maybe it’s as simple as you read the Bible and you read about an astounding miracle that just doesn’t seem possible. Do you nurture a bunch of naturalist theories to explain it away? Does your heart speculate from something you read in the past? Or maybe you work with some coworkers who just come against the miraculous nature of what’s written in Scripture and the supernatural character of the Bible and in that fear of man, you don’t resist that idea, you start entertaining the world’s speculations about how those things could be explained. You want to die to self? Then don’t entertain those speculations, even for a second, because eventually, you’ll even entertain a speculation about the resurrection of Christ and be threatening to destroy the gospel. You’ll resist. If you want more of Christ, you’ll resist all speculations about the inerrancy, the infallibility, the authority, and sufficiency of Scripture. Self dies a little more when you resist all those speculations.

How about when Scripture says there’s an eternal judgment coming and you have books by so-called evangelicals who say, “No, there’s no such thing as hell,” or others who say, “There might be a hell but no one’s going there,” like one pastor in the area told me? Or you might read in evangelical circles people who are speculating about whether hell is eternal. Some might say that there’s no eternal judgment coming at all and that those who die without repenting of their sin and believing in Christ won’t end up in hell forever. Do you entertain those ideas? Maybe for the sake of getting a family member scooted into the kingdom you’ve created a softer version of judgment. You want to die to self? Submit yourself to what Christ says about His grace and ultimate coming judgment. God has fixed a day, Paul told those on Mars Hill, God has fixed a day, in that great sermon in Acts 17, in which He will judge in righteousness through a Man whom He confirmed by raising from the dead.

You say, “Well, Pastor, my heart aches for lost loved ones who’ve never believed.” Yes, I understand that. But if you want to die to self, then entrust those griefs and burdens to the holiness of Christ and the glory of Christ who alone can comfort your heart with truth. **Genesis 18:25**: *“Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?”* You and I do not understand the ultimate purposes of God. But when we face Him, you will not say a word about His justice, except to praise it and extol it. There won’t be any questions. You want to die to self? Bring yourself under what the Scriptures say, because each time you believe the truth, you renounce the lies that your flesh serves up to your mind and your heart. The flesh doesn’t like these truths. But each day you can die to those old powerless lies by faith and letting the truth completely have its way in your heart, then the Spirit forms new convictions.

How about your worldview? When Scriptures’ worldview goes against certain humanistic ideas that you’ve held dear, do you renounce your old understanding and embrace Scripture by faith? If you do, you’re dying to self. Here’s an example of some that have really robbed the church of the death of self and really fostered a self-exaltation – theistic evolution, people who believe in the scientific conclusions of fallen men, and begin to doubt the Genesis record. Genesis 1 and 2, straightforward in Scripture, and you might be an intellectual and have a high regard for the data and the conclusions of science, but Scripture is the word of Almighty God, that’s where you must immerse yourself. Newsflash – scientists were not present when all was created. They weren’t present. God was present. It was spoken into existence from nothing, God was the only one that was there, and He created angels then who watched Him create the rest.

Master the text of Scripture. It humbles your intellect. Master the text of Scripture. Know what God actually says. And then immerse yourself in the details of every passage, and what is the Holy Spirit going to do? I read it earlier. **Psalm 119**, He's going to open your eyes to see wondrous things revealed in His Word. Sometimes people come along and they say, "Well, we've got scholarship on our side." Scholarship? The scholarship of men? Here's what **James 3** says: if anyone thinks he's wise in this age, right? Where is the debater of this age, **1 Corinthians 3**? **James 3** says wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, reasonable, humble, holy, seeks God. Wisdom from men? That's just all about human intellect.

Or how about when excuses are offered up by your heart when cultural ideas for the reason people do what they do, in other words, we make excuses for particular behaviors, which the Bible clearly calls sinful. Do you renounce, in the moment, your attraction to those excuses and do you let the absolute authority of Scripture indict where it must? I mean we have served up excuses for man's behavior, redefining sin, we have said everything we can say to try to distance ourselves from Scriptures' indictment on human behavior, pop psychology comes along and blames environment, blames parents, blames brainwaves. Everything to get away from having to say, "I've got to deal with God. Straight up." Do you renounce those attractions to those excuses? Do you come back to the Bible, do you minister with care and love to those people who are struggling with particular issues and attitudes and confusion, desperation? Do you trust the Scriptures to bring clarity to their mind and heart like it's brought clarity to everyone whom God has saved?

What about unbiblical ideas that have gain acceptance in the church? Have you believed in self-esteem? The ideology of self-esteem is not in the Bible. "Oh, but I've held it dear and raised my kids on it." You didn't have to raise your kids on it, they already esteem themselves by nature. You tell them a thousand times that they're sinners, they won't believe it. You tell them a thousand times they need hope in Christ, they're not going to believe it until God moves, and the only way He moves is for you to give them the gospel. Over and over again, give them the diagnosis from Scripture of their heart.

People have believed that the hero lies in themselves. People today who profess to be evangelicals say you can have your best life now. Really? I love what John MacArthur said, "If this is your best life now, you're going to hell." True? It is true. That's a lie from the pit, that someday there's going to be a homosexual gene found in science that excuses everybody's issue with this. It won't matter what science says, the Scriptures are clear. It's a perversion. It's a denial of the design of God. Even if you know it from your earliest years or have same-sex attraction for as long as you've ever known, it doesn't mean anything, it just means you're fallen. You'll have sinful attractions, based upon a whole bunch of lies in your heart and in your mind. Of course, it's not a surprise. We do the same thing with anybody like that as we do with any other sin. We bring them to Christ. Even in Corinth there were all kinds of homosexuals that God saved and Paul said, "And you were washed, and you were cleansed."

Do you buy into the ideology of the day? That education can solve all man's problems? Boy, isn't that a huge one in our culture. How about forgive yourself before you can forgive others? It's not in the Bible. But have you held on to that? If you want to die to self, you've got to let the Scriptures indict your ideologies and notions and correct them and submit to this. Even if you've lived by something of error all your life, you must begin to jettison it. If you don't, you cannot have more of Christ and less of you.

When applying the Scripture will infringe on your pet preferences, on your idols of comfort, you've got to renounce your preferences and run to Christ. He is to be your highest comfort. If you do that, you're dying to self. Let's go around the Scriptures and see what the Spirit of God says. **Philippians 4**. There could be some pain involved in this little thing here. **Philippians 4**. What does it say in **verse 6**? "*Be anxious for nothing.*" And in all of your Bibles you have in the white spaces a huge parentheses that gives you some right to downplay and soften and put a dimmer switch on that truth. Why? Because you have pet preferences, comforts you don't want to let go of. Being anxious makes you feel at home, worrying about things you shouldn't worry about kind of is familiar territory to you.

To actually lay something at the feet of Christ and leave it there, whoa....that means that Christ may do whatever He wants to do and I cannot have that. You want to die to self and have more of Christ? Are you going to work in prayer for the sake of the love of Christ, submit to that verse and be anxious for nothing today? Seek Christ for your anxiety. **1 Peter 5:7**, right? *“Cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.”* What’s the next verse, **1 Peter 5:8**: *“[Be careful], be on the alert, [because] your adversary, the devil, prowls around [the earth] like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour.”*

There’s no qualification there that says he isn’t seeking to devour Christians. He can’t devour your eternal soul, he can’t keep you from Christ ultimately, but he can make you, oh, so ineffective and so full of yourself, and so full of your own anxieties and cares and burdens, that you can’t think straight. You’re derelict in the things that make for a service to Christ because you’re all bound up because you don’t want to apply the Scriptures because it’ll infringe upon your pet preference and your idol of comfort.

James 1:2-3. What does it say? *“[Count] it all joy.”* This isn’t contrived happy emotions. *“[Count] it all joy...when you encounter various trials [and tests] knowing* (not feeling, knowing by faith, that trials, these tests, are to work endurance in you) *the testing of your faith produces endurance.”* And then what does he say? So let it *“have its perfect result.”* (v. 4) Let it have its way with you. Give yourself over to the trial.

Oh, that will rob me of the little comforts that secure me every day and get me from my sun up to sun down with survival.

Lord, I have a set of coping skills, you’re asking me to dump those in the trash.

Yes. He’s commanding you. And He’s saying *“let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”* (v. 4)

What? You mean trials are the path to blessing? That just makes no sense in my preferential mind. It makes no sense to my humanity.

Yes, but you get to die to self when you put yourself under God’s Word. Let endurance, the ability to remain under, that’s that terminology in the original. Let remaining under a test have its perfect result, so wait on the Lord, learn to want what He wants, and trust yourself to the process, believing that it’s His love that has purposed this for you, and you will die to self.

How about **1 Thessalonians 5:18**? How we doing, by the way? The Scriptures just indict, don’t they? They just indict. This isn’t me, you can get mad at me, throw stuff at me, but it’s not me. **1 Thessalonians 5:18**. *In a few exciting things, give thanks.* That’s your version, that’s my version sometimes.

Man, the Scriptures just don’t bend. *“In everything...” “In everything...”* Man, we just gather family, we eat great meals this time of year, we have candlelight services, we send thank you cards to people, we offer up thanks to God – *in everything?* Whoa, that’s indicting. Let the indictment come. Let it come not generally, but specifically.

Lord, in what ways am I full of me and demands and entitlements? In what way am I not grateful because you say, “In everything.”?

So that means no complaining. The pattern of your life, if you want to take up your cross daily, this is how you love Christ and do less of you, you do not complain against God. You do not have discontentment toward God in thought or attitude. This isn’t so much not complaining against other people, that’s obvious. That’s the obvious outworking. This is complaints against God. *“In everything give thanks...”* To whom? To God. Just let it indict you, specifically, and then let it build you up and lift you up in His grace to do better, to be more faithful to Him, and you’ll be dying to self a little more.

We’re not done. Philippians 2. Some of you were wishing it. It’s in here. It’s all in here. There’s no avoiding it. **Philippians 2:3** (ouch): *“Do nothing from selfishness.”* Literally, “Do nothing according to the course of

selfishness or for your self's sake, which brings contention," would be kind of an expanded translation. *"Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind (here it is) regard one another as more important than yourselves."* Consider them more important, set aside your pet preferences, it doesn't matter what God gives you to enjoy, when He puts you up in the life of someone else, taking up your cross daily and dying to self means to consider them more important, regard them, treat them as more important than your life. And all the pet exceptions you have written down to this, jettison them. Get rid of them. There are no exceptions.

Jesus was not to be outdone of course, the Lord and Master of all of these things, Matthew 18. He's talking with His disciples and He says these words in **Matthew 18:21-22**: *"Peter came to him and said, 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you, up to seven times...'"*

I'm so glad the Lord began that way. "Get rid of that answer altogether. That's not what I say. Do you want to align yourself with Me? I don't say that."

Why? What's He saying?

"I don't have a limit. You want to follow Me, you deny yourself, you take up your cross daily, you follow Me, you don't have a limit. So, I'm just going to use your number and do a massive multiplication which you'll never reach, seventy times seven, Peter."

"Seventy times seven."

You really die to yourself when you release your personal right to judge someone for an offense. A real offense. We're not talking about perceived offenses, we're not even talking about those times when you're personally offended at things God isn't offended at. We get offended by all kinds of things. We were laughing yesterday in the sports world, just watching all the games and you know, people are just so easily offended. We were watching rugby and rugby in the World Cup is done in other countries where they have these funny little athletic interactions and the officials are so polite and the players are polite and the official kind of comes over there, "Now listen, you got to get your attitude right or I'm going to call a penalty on you." You know what I mean?

"My attitude needs adjustment? What are you talking about?"

It's like they have a very respectful subculture by which they operate and we were just marveling at what's happened in athletics in our country. If an official came over there and said, "Listen, you know, I don't like your attitude."

"Is there a rule about attitude? Who are you?"

"I'm an authority in this game."

"Yeah, for the rulebook, but not my attitude."

I mean we have a sense of entitlement. You really die to self when you give up your personal right to judge someone who has offended you with a real offense, something that offends God, a sin, a sin you could point to in the Bible, a sin you could hold over somebody with gospel authority. And when you set aside your personal right to judge them, then you leave that up to the Lord and then you can reach out with no bitterness and can reach out in ministry, and even in confrontation and love if you have to. You really die to self when you do that.

When you lavishly pardon someone reaching out in love to minister to them, even if your ministry to them is a rebuke, even if a ministry to them is to say, "The Lord's going to deal with you because you have not repented," but there's nothing in your heart, no vigilante justice taking over, you really die to self when you release your personal right to judge. That is what the word *forgive*, or at least the main technical term for forgiveness in the New Testament means. It means to release, and it's used in context that means you release your personal right to hold

something against someone and get payment from them. You leave that to the Lord. You really die to self when you do that.

How about what Jesus said in **Matthew 5:44**: *“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”* Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you? Yes, because Jesus did the same. While we were enemies, Christ died for us. The rain falls on the just and the unjust in the heart of a patient God in common grace. And so we’re like our heavenly Father when we pray for our enemies and pray for those who persecute us.

James 3:16: *“Where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.”* Do you believe that? Do you submit your heart to that or do you hold on to a little bit of ambition over here for yourself? Building your trophies, advancing your earthly empire? The Bible says where there is any kind of envy or jealousy and any kind of stepping on others to get ahead, any kind of work to see them come to less while you have more, any of that kind of jealousy or selfish ambition rather than the glory of Christ, wherever that exists, there is disorder and every kind of evil to follow. Do you really submit to that? If you do, you’re dying to self a little more each day. We all have selfish ambition in our hearts. We all become green with envy. And it happens so suddenly, we just didn’t even realize it was about to happen and there it is, and the Scripture has exposed it and you were all envious all week and full of turmoil because that person gets ahead and you never get anything, and you do all that, and then you come to church and the pastor just had to be preaching on James 3:16.

Let it indict your heart and then let it correct and build. How do you do that? Believe it by faith. Submit to it and renounce, in the submitting by faith, renounce the old preference. How about your motivations? When Scripture confronts a sinful motivation? No one else can see it, it’s a secret sin before the Lord. You can see it. You know it’s there. The Spirit of God just brought it to mind and it hits you and you just don’t want to look at it, you’re like the guy in James who looks in the mirror and he just walks away quickly, he doesn’t want to see the flaws. But if you gaze intently at the law which liberates, you see your flaws and when you see a motivation the Spirit of God has revealed it to you, and you know that’s what drives your decisions, and you want so badly to hold on to it, hide it, keep it in the closet, tell the Spirit to stop that, turn the light down. You want to die to self in that moment? Then starve that old motive, don’t feed it, set new biblical motives in front of your mind and heart.

You say, “How do you get the sharpest clarity about those things?” Scripture, right? **Hebrews 4:12**. Scriptures will go all the way down and give you surgical clarity and precision between thoughts and intentions. I always say that to people, “You want clarity on your internal problem? Don’t ask me, I’m no expert, I don’t have any magic wand, I can’t open up your heart and see what God sees.” I know this, as long as I can bring the Scriptures with clarity, I know that it’ll do what Hebrews 4:12 says it’ll do. It’ll divide between thoughts and intentions of the heart. Do you really want that? Because here it comes. You’re dying to self every time you allow truth to have its way.

I tell you what, beloved, our culture has not helped with this, because we have now found an avenue to broadcast and publish every opinion that pops into our mind. Don’t we? Jesus said in **Matthew 12** you’re going to be held accountable for every careless word. It’s all coming up. It’s all going to be brought back up. All of it rehearsed.

You say, “Well, I’m forgiven in Christ.”

Yeah, but it doesn’t mean it’s not going to be ashes. **1 Corinthians 3**, when you meet Christ, you’ll be saved, yet so as through fire. Your works are going to be tested. Yes, you’re forgiven, yes, you have the inheritance, but don’t think for a moment that your careless words are going to be laying there in a heap of ashes and it might be just so much that it haunts you in that moment, how much you could have used words for Him and didn’t. But you were full of opinions. And after all, you never stopped to ask whether you should share it, you just share it, because you can. And no one holds you accountable, right? Who’s going to get on your account and say something about it? Who’s going to police what you say? And if somebody does police what you say, they typically police it with their opinions and off to the races we go.

Can I just say as a footnote, people in the church are talking too much. You're talking too much. Quick to hear, slow to – what? Speak. Some of us have that the other way around. That's not good. We can't die to self. Opinions all over the place, all day long they're shared, constantly, endlessly. And we're just sort of lining right up with society who puffs itself up with its own opinions.

I love technology, beloved, I love it, I use it, I wish I were better at it. You young people have such great skill. Let me tell you something, these public forums, even your social family forums, Facebook and things like that, it's not a place for your opinions. It's just not. It's not helpful. It's just opinions. Just put your precious pictures on there so people can say, "Oooh, ahhhh." I'm not laying down a law, I'm just telling you wisdom. Be careful. Why? Because sometimes that's going to be an avenue through which you're going to live to self and not die to self.

Next week we're going to talk about portals that you have to close. Practical portals through which some of this love of self and this diminishing of Christ is flooding into your life. You want more of Christ and less of you? Allow the truth to do an indicting work and then let it rebuild you according to what the Scriptures say.

Pray daily for spiritual understanding, that's the death of self-reliance. Orient your daily life toward the truth to promote it, that's the death of self-indulgence. And allow the truth to indict and correct your heart, that's the death of self-exaltation. Five more to go.

Let's pray: Lord, we're just not there. We're just not there yet. We desperately need Your clarity. Thank You for Your Word, thank You for its indicting grace as much as its healing grace, thank You that it condemns our error and our sin, for that counter-balances our coddling of such things. We need to know the immovability and piercing clarity and even rebuking authority of Your truth. And then let us be a people who let it indict us, with the joy of knowing that having been given grace in salvation we have now been given grace to be renewed in our thinking and lifted up and encouraged by Your truth, and as much as we're convicted, let us be convinced of its implications, knowing that Your power will help us and empower us and strengthen us to walk in these things. Lord, may we die to self a little more every time truth hits us. We desperately pray for this, trusting You for what You've promised, in the person and work of Christ we pray. Amen.