

Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

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Giving Up Your Life To Follow Jesus

by Dan Trygg

“And He was saying to all, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. ²⁴ For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, but whoever might lose his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it.’”

Luke 9:23,24

“This I say therefore, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the unbelievers also walk, in the futility of their mind. ¹⁸ They are being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, due to the hardness of their heart. ¹⁹ And they, having become callous to their inner pain, have given themselves over to sensuality, for the practice of every kind of impurity with an inexhaustible desire for more. ²⁰ But you did not learn Christ in this way, ²¹ if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, ²² that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, ²³ and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, ²⁴ and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.”

Ephesians 4:17-24

“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.”

Galatians 5:16-17

What’s it gonna be? Are you going to follow Jesus Christ, or *not*? I mean, *really* follow Him? *Are you* really following Him, at this point in your life? *Is* that truly the goal of your life, or, **if you were to be honest, are you living your life, and Jesus is more of an afterthought?** *Are you* seriously wanting *His* will for your life, or do you just want Him to “bless” what *you* have willed and created *for yourself*? **Many of us have heard that God has a wonderful plan for our lives. Are you living out that plan?** *Are you* even seriously trying to *find out* what it might be? **Are you sincerely investing in your spiritual life to grow and discover God’s will for you?** *Are you doing* what He has revealed to you? **Are you taking any risks for God? Are you paying a price to pursue Him and His will?** *Are you stepping out of your comfort zone* to obey God? **Are you willing to do what is not easy, ...what requires effort, sacrifice, and leads you into inconvenience to serve Him and His people?** *Are you finding your patience and perseverance tested because obedience leads to trying places?* *Are you* are willing to humbly serve *there*? **Is your spiritual life about God, or about you?** Our financial expenditures reveal a lot about where our true values and priorities are. **Does your bank account reveal that you are a serious disciple of Christ?** God said that to withhold the tithe (10% of your income) and offerings was *robbing* Him! (Mal. 3:7-12) Can you look God in the eye and say you *are* a serious disciple, while He examines at your giving? **What are you doing to make Him and His Kingdom a priority in Your life?** It is one thing to come up short, when you *first* learn what the Bible says about this, but *have you done anything to free up finances for giving?* **Do you still spend frivolously in some areas, but won’t give God His portion?** Again, is it about *you*, or about *Him*? Is Starbucks more important? Entertainment? Sports? Clothes? Eating out? Cigarettes? Mood-altering drugs? Cell phones or techno-gadgets? Do you have money for *these* things, but you don’t believe you have the ability to give to honor God or support His work? The Lord got after the Israelites for living in their paneled houses (Hag. 1), when His house was left ignored. They were living in comfort, but the work of God was abandoned. This is *not* a small thing to Him. He sees it as mockery, as dishonoring or trivializing Him (Gal. 6:6,7), ...and He is absolutely right! **What happened to sacrificial giving? Are you really “sold out” for Jesus? What are you willing to sell, ...or downsize, or simplify..., to have more available to use for His work?** *Are you truly* willing to “put your money where your mouth is”? What is *your* mission in life? **God has a mission. It is to magnify Jesus by reconciling as many people to Him as will come, and to train them to become active, obedient servants, serving Him and others in Jesus’ name** (Eph. 1:10; Col. 1:20; Matt. 18-20). **Is that your mission?** Is that what *you* are all about? The word, “commitment” originally meant to “join in a mission with another person”. **To be “committed” is to “be on mission together”.** When we committed our lives to Jesus Christ, we were signing up to be part of *His* mission, to help to exalt His name and advance His Kingdom. **What are you doing to invest in and advance the Kingdom of Christ?**

These are just questions, questions designed to get us to examine ourselves a bit, to see where our level of dedication is. **Jesus set a high bar for becoming a disciple.** Yes, He loved us, and died for us, even before we knew or understood of His love, and **we don’t have to do anything to earn our salvation. We don’t earn points by doing good deeds, or by performing religious rituals. His offer is totally free.** All we have to do is take Him up on the grace He has made available to us. **BUT, we need to understand that His presence in our life is meant to change everything!!** What we are signing up for, when we accept Christ, is an entirely *new* life. Remember how

He preached? “Repent! For the Kingdom of God is at hand!” He preached a baptism of repentance, a baptism that represented a death and cleansing from the old selfish life, and a consecration to a new life lived *for* God as your King. **Salvation is all about being set free to live for God!** We were acquitted (justified) of all charges before God (Rom. 3:24), so we could escape Satan’s accusations and live unhindered for the King who took away our sins. We were redeemed, bought out of slavery to sin, so that we might serve a new Master, Christ. In Ephesians 1, Paul says that before the foundation of the world God determined that those who were in Christ would be (a.) holy (dedicated/set-apart) and blameless before Him; (b.) adopted as His children; (c.) to the praise of His glory (vss. 4,5,12). **He is working out a universe-wide plan that is exalting Jesus (Phil. 2:5-15), and we have been recruited to join His team!** This, however, means that we have to give up our old identity, our former sins, our old allegiances and the disregard toward Him that used to mark our lives. **We have a new identity to put on. We have a new calling and purpose for life. God has enabled and empowered us to be a blessing to others and to bring Him honor.**

This is what Jesus was talking about when He said, “If anyone desires to come after Me, He must deny himself (his old, self-centered life), take up his cross daily (die to that old way of living on a daily basis), and follow Me.” If you try to preserve your old self, you will ruin who you could be; but if will give up your old self-directed-life for Jesus’ sake, and follow Him, you will save your true-self from ruin. Jesus is saying that **there are two versions of who you are, or two strategies for living. One is the self-directed life, which will turn us inward, toward self-pleasure, loving things and using people.** It will lead to excesses and unhealthy living, pride, fear, anxiety and a host of character defects and relational problems. Because experiences and pleasures cannot fulfill the deeper inner spiritual emptiness, these people are always searching for more. Contentment eludes them. **The other version for your life is living the Spirit-led, Jesus-centered life, using things and loving people.** Instead of living to satisfy myself, I live to express the overflowing heart of God. He fills me with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control. Because you are “filled up” inside, you experience contentment, and can truly give of yourself to love and serve others. As you give, you receive even more, and you find your joy and strength renewed. You discover it truly *is* more blessed to give than to receive. **As you express the Spirit-filled life, you begin to experience who you really are, and what you were made for, namely to be filled to the full with the life, vitality and goodness of God.**

Notice that **there are two versions for life mentioned in the Ephesians 4 passage, as well.** Paul calls these the “old self” and the “new self”. It is important to note that **it is possible for born-again Christians to choose to live the same futile manner of living that those who do not know God employ.** Paul wrote to admonish the Ephesians to “no longer” live that way. Instead, they are to put off the old man, with his evil or unprofitable practices, and be renewed in their self-perception, so they could put on the new person, with his new identity, orientation, and Spirit-led expressions. **There are two very different versions of life that are available to us in any given moment. We decide which one we will take, which way we will live, and what kind of person we will become.**

In the Galatians letter, Paul had to address the confusion caused by some false teachers who came into the church shortly after he left. These Judaizers, as they were called, said it was not enough to believe in Jesus. They said that these new believers had to keep the Jewish ceremonial laws. **By focusing on keeping laws, rules and religious practices, however, the Galatian Christians had been subtly distracted from being led by the Spirit. Even though it seemed like it was a teaching that was attempting to honor God, it actually displaced Him.** The laws *themselves* took the place that should have been reserved for *Him*. **Instead of being God-centered, the Judaizers were promoting a rule-centered approach to life. It was a twist on self-centered living. They were trying to live by their own self-power.** By attempting to live by law, they were depending on their own understanding to know what rule applied in each situation. Then, they would try to live out the rules by virtue of their own self-will. **It wasn’t working. Why?** Because, when they turned from God to religion, they turned away from having a living relationship with the life-empowering Holy Spirit. **They weren’t asking for God’s help or direction, so He let them see what happened when they were on their own. It was miserable.** How could religious people be so petty, nasty and negative? How could they be falling back into their old sinful behaviors? It was because **they were living from the same source they had tried to live from before they came to Christ, ...their own self-ability.** It didn’t work then, and it won’t work now. Apart from the leading of the Spirit, they experienced the same old selfish mindset and desires. **So, Paul delineates two versions of life in Galatians, as well. You can either live by the flesh, or by the Spirit. If you try to live by the flesh, you have effectively cut off the flow of the Spirit into your life. You are on your own, ...with your old, fleshly self. If you want victory over sin, Christlike character and power for living, it comes only as we are living by the Spirit.** Even *religious* flesh is lifeless, and the sin nature within us will eventually overcome even the best intentions, if there is no power from above.

There are two versions for our lives, a God-centered, Spirit-empowered life, or a self-centered, powerless life produced by human ability alone. Which do you want?