

TRUE DEVOTION – SELF-DENIAL

January 5, 2014

Matthew 1:13-28

And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.” Luke 9:59, 60

When Jesus answered the disciples’ doubts regarding His approaching crucifixion, His rebuke included this shocking statement: “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Matt. 16:24). Jesus used strong imagery when exhorting His people to self-denial. To one whose eye was prone to lust He advised, “pluck it out, and cast it from thee,” and to one whose right hand inclined to sinful actions He admonished, “cut it if off, and cast it from thee” (Matt. 5:28-30).

The apostles were no less emphatic. Paul wrote, “present your bodies a living sacrifice,” and called this a “reasonable service” (Rom. 12:1). His warning is clear: “For if ye live after the flesh ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify (put to death) the deeds of the body, ye shall live” (Rom. 8:13).

These warnings are not well-received by many, and much of the modern church seems oblivious to them. Yet they are the Word of God, and they express the will of God, absolutely and without dilution. Why is Scripture so forceful in advocating self-denial? Because

1. Lusts of the flesh do battle against our souls. “Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.” I Peter 2:11

2. “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” Matthew 6:24

3. Love of this world-system marks those who are not partakers of God’s love. This world-system is nothing less than a universal manifestation of the individual “lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.” I John 2:15, 16

4. Christ forsook all, and we are exhorted to follow Him. Matthew 16:24; Philipians 2:5-8

5. To present our bodies a living sacrifice unto God is our “reasonable service.” We are to “mortify” our lusts. Romans 12:1; Colossians 3:5

6. “And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.” Luke 9:62