

Dying to Self

And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again. - 2 Corinthians 5:15

Chapter 1 - Isn't the Word "Death" too Extreme?

And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. - Luke 9:23

There are some in Christian circles that consider the requirement to "take up his cross" to be a euphemism for being willing to be inconvenienced. The cross was symbolic of death. Not just death, but intentional death. Since this was to be done "daily", we can see that something other than physical death is implied. However, it is still a "death" that is meant.

for if ye live after the flesh, ye must die; but if by the Spirit ye put to death the deeds of the body, ye shall live. - Romans 8:13

Put to death therefore your members which are upon the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry; for which things' sake cometh the wrath of God upon the sons of disobedience: wherein ye also once walked, when ye lived in these things; but now do ye also put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, railing, shameful speaking out of your mouth: lie not one to another; seeing that ye have put off the old man with his doings, and have put on the new man, that is being renewed unto knowledge after the image of him that created him: - Colossians 3:5-10

We can see a picture of bad things that are inside of us that we have in common with everyone else in the world. However, because of the newness of life we have as a result in trusting in Jesus, we have the opportunity to replace those old qualities with new ones called the "new man". This replacement has two parts, "putting away" (or putting to death) and "putting on" (walking by the Spirit).

Even so reckon ye also yourselves to be dead unto sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus. - Romans 6:11

Dying to self is not a complete death of a person. We already see that physical death is not a part of this process. Since we are admonished to "reckon ourselves to be dead to sin", there is something we are to do in relation to something that is in us.

Some more modern Christian practices embrace a view that "Jesus loves us just the way we are". This sounds very appealing, however, it is not true.

For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me, but to do that which is good is not. - Romans 7:18

That which is within us is not something that needs to be corrected. It is not something that needs instruction. What we have inside of us is so harmful to us and repugnant to God that it needs to be put to death. This is similar to the removal of a malignant cancer.

Chapter 2 - The Sin Nature

And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be

preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. - 1 Thessalonians 5:23

Man was created in the image of God and God gave him the breath of life. The Christian has received new life from God re-constituting him to the condition in which man was originally created, having body soul and spirit.

The body can be thought of as the means we have of interacting with the physical environment. The soul can be thought of as the means we have to interact with each other. The spirit can be thought of as the means we have to interact with God. Satan approached Eve at the level of her soul.

Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which Jehovah God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of any tree of the garden? - Genesis 3:1

This one incident is interesting because so much flows from it. While there are many other aspects to consider, our main focus is on how an appeal to the soul can result in a decision to either call on God for help (which would have produced a much different result) or use our own judgment. Adam was warned that he would “die” the day he in effect turned from God.

but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. - Genesis 2:17

We can see at that moment Adam lost his connection with God. If we consider that the spirit component of man became dead, we can begin to see that what was left was condemned to exist in a state of seeking after self.

And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig-leaves together, and made themselves aprons. And they heard the voice of Jehovah God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of Jehovah God amongst the trees of the garden. - Genesis 3:7-8

We are all biologically connected to Adam and Eve. It is through this connection that we inherit what is called the sin nature, the flesh, or the “old man”

And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. - 1 Corinthians 15:45-47

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.- 1 Corinthians 15:22

Paul wrote about his own struggles with the flesh in Romans chapter seven.

O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin. - Romans 7:24-25

Prior to salvation we all were captive to the sinful impulses of the flesh. After salvation these impulses are still present, but we have the opportunity to overcome them.

Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that

henceforth we should not serve sin. - Romans 6:6

However, not all Christians make progress overcoming the fleshly (carnal) nature.

And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? - 1 Corinthians 3:1-3

Some even mistakenly attempt to regulate their inclination to sin with prohibitions and ironically, fleshly efforts.

But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. - Galatians 4:9-10

O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? - Galatians 3:1-3

If then you have died with Christ to material ways of looking at things and have escaped from the world's crude and elemental notions and teachings of externalism, why do you live as if you still belong to the world? [Why do you submit to rules and regulations?--such as] Do not handle [this], Do not taste [that], Do not even touch [them], Referring to things all of which perish with being used. To do this is to follow human precepts and doctrines. Such [practices] have indeed the outward appearance [that popularly passes] for wisdom, in promoting self-imposed rigor of devotion and delight in self-humiliation and severity of discipline of the body, but they are of no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh (the lower nature). [Instead, they do not honor God but serve only to indulge the flesh.] - Colossians 2:20-23 AMP

Our sinful nature, the flesh, or the old man is essentially that within us that seeks after the world and selfishness. While the new life we receive in Jesus when we get saved frees us from the compelling influence, we still struggle with the legacy of its lusts and desires. It is not conquered by strength, but by indifference. As we grow to be more led by the Spirit, the influence of the flesh fades away as it starves to death.

For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. - Galatians 6:8

Chapter 3 - Parenthood - The First Lessons of Selflessness

Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; - Proverbs 22:15a

Some hold to a romantic view of the innocence of children. This view seems to be supported by the complete weakness and dependence of newborns. However, even before a child can walk or talk, the selfishness of the heart is made manifest by tantrums and demands beyond the necessary such as food, warmth, and cleaning.

The harshness of the natural (fallen) world places restrictions on the opportunities we have to give expression to our natural selfishness. However, it is often only when we are confronted with the needs of our own children that we begin to face having to relinquish some of our own selfish desires.

But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel. - 1 Timothy 5:8

Making “provision” for children goes beyond food, clothing, and shelter. The time and effort to form character is also a requirement.

Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying. - Proverbs 19:18

A fool despiseth his father's instruction: but he that regardeth reproof is prudent.- Proverbs 15:5

One of the first indicators of a culture turning to selfishness is a decrease in the number of children. Usually a significant decrease is first observed through the use of barrier type contraception. As a society increases in selfishness children can be actually killed in a number of ways such as surgically aborted, aborted through oral contraceptives, aborted as a method of sex selection, burned alive in a sacrifice to an idol in the hope of obtaining a good harvest, abandoned to die on the streets, or even when they are older, sent off to die in foolish wars.

One might consider in horror the extent privation can drive parents to;

The hands of merciful women have boiled their own children, They have been for food to them, In the destruction of the daughter of my people. - Lamentations 4:10

However, less discernable, but possibly more contemptible is the modern disinterest in children and their fate motivated solely by convenience, ease, and a desire for comfort. If one were to consider what steps could be taken to attempt to “die to self” (reduce selfishness), first on the list might be to stop killing our children.

In the natural world the burden and expense of children are a sort of training program to force us to abandon our selfish inclinations. Our desire to avoid these strictures reflect a selfish childish heart that, in a sense, does not want to grow up itself.

When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. - 1 Corinthians 13:11

Chapter 4 - The national influence of selfishness

Japan is an interesting study. They had already collectivized under the Shogunate when Western military forces impressed upon them their need to adopt the Western practices of industrialization, militarization, and colonialism. As a nation they followed a path of national selfishness first attacking Russia in 1905 and the US in 1941.

Having been defeated by the US, Japan plunged wholeheartedly in adopting Western culture

(essentially capitalism and consumerism). Japan experienced unprecedented prosperity. They are now a dying culture. The collective result of individual selfishness is national suicide most obviously seen in a lack of children.

It is this unrestrained selfishness that is also killing Europe and the US although the death of these is somewhat masked by the importation of replacement cultures. What can seem obvious with nations can be less noticeable with individuals. Selfishness is consumptive. There is nothing built for the future. It is like suicide by cannibalism.

Chapter 5 - The Pastor - A one man band

In considering modern church practice, the analogy to the description of a football game comes to mind: 50,000 people who desperately need exercise watching 22 people desperately needing rest.

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: - Ephesians 4:11-12

How Christian practice came to be an institutionalized organizational system administered by a professional class could be a confluence of bad intentions such as leaders seeking greater control as well as laity adverse to any requirement to put forth effort. It was supposed to be regular Christians doing the “work of the ministry”

A Christian may find that his sincere desire to grow in Christ, minister to others, and die to self frustrated by his encounter of actual opposition from his own church, pastor, and other church members. Organizational church structure has a momentum and inertia that does not welcome change or deviation.

Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. - Mark 7:7

A pastor that sees his church as a machine and that it is his responsibility to keep the machine running smoothly may see any request outside of the functions that the machine has been programmed for as a threat. While the Christian may expect his pastor to enthusiastically support his desire to walk more by the Spirit, he may be surprised if he encounters disinterest or even hostility.

But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. - Revelation 2:6

The word “Nicolaitan” has not been identified as a particular group in history. However, it is likely that the word is a compound in the Greek meaning power over the people. Pastors today face a real difficulty to their faith as well as the faith of their members. Organizational systems tend to push the leader into the flesh to keep up with all the system demands as well as de-emphasize others who might be able to share the load. When a church does not seek or cannot recognize wisdom within their membership, it is an indication that they rely too much on their pastor.

I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that shall be able

to judge between his brethren? - 1 Corinthians 6:5

The church member seeking help to subordinate the inclinations of the flesh and die to self may find that the pastor is so encumbered with his system duties that he can be of little help. The other members of the church may just refer a person to the pastor.

Chapter 6 - The Frankenstein of our Flesh

The fictional character Frankenstein was a creature made of the parts of dead bodies and given a re-animated life via the power of lightening. The Christian faces a somewhat similar internal monster each time new life is given to the flesh.

But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another. This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. - Galatians 5:15-17

There are choices we make that place us in situations where self is elevated rather than diminished. We might take a job that pays well thinking we will be able to provide a good life for our family. However, we may come to see that we are required to spend increasingly more time away from our family. We may even find that ambitions for fame or money are stirred and we become even more entangled with that which attracts our flesh.

We all too often think that selfishness only applies to big things like greed and ambition. We are not likely to see that something as seemingly insignificant as our desire to share about the purchase of a new car with a friend at church may lead us to overlook an elderly woman in need of a sympathetic ear.

Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. - Phillipians 2:3-4

A farmer looks after the welfare of his livestock, a military officer insures his men are provided for, and mother makes sure her children are clothed and fed. There are many demands on us to forgo our own interests and seek after the interests of others. However, we tend to default back to thinking and acting to satisfy ourselves. As the farmer, the officer, and the mother begin to place more emphasis on their immediate desires and preferences, their responsibilities begin to slip.

Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. - Isaiah 49:15

The resurrection of the influence of the flesh begins with just a glance. As we consider something that appeals to us our attention begins to become attached to that which we have observed.

Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life. Put away from thee a froward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee. Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look

straight before thee. Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. - Proverbs 4:23-26

Dying to self requires a reiterative process of turning away from that which beckons us with fleshly appeals of comfort, ease, lust, pride, stimulation, and even delusions. It can be sad and discouraging when we consider how often our old nature attempts to reassert itself and how often we allow it to gain a foothold.

As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly. - Proverbs 26:11

We know that in spite of our failures, that we can depend upon the Lord to help us to grow in strength to resist the desires of our sinful hearts.

But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil. - 2 Thessalonians 3:3

The Christian life, including the aspects of dying to self and walking by the spirit, is progressive. We know that we will have false starts, make mistakes, and require correction. However, our ultimate objective is Christ-likeness.

My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you, - Galatians 4:19

Chapter 7 - Resonance with the world

A tuning fork is sometimes used to adjust a musical device such as a piano. The physical characteristics of the device are such that when a sound wave of a precise frequency is made by the musical instrument, the fork begins to vibrate being able to receive the maximum amount of sound energy because it has been so constructed as to respond to a specific musical note and no others.

We know that Satan sets the course of the world.

Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: - Ephesians 2:2

He has constructed it to achieve his objectives. We may assume that it involves collectivizing the entire world in a hierarchical system to leverage his influence (since he cannot be everywhere at once). We can understand some of his plans;

Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices. - 2 Corinthians 2:11

How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. - Isaiah 14:12-

We are also told that Christians should not be part of this evolving world system.

Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. - James 4:4

If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. - John 15:19

Our ability to surrender our selfishness is greatly hindered by the design of the world which resonates with our flesh like the Sirens calling Ulysses to his doom.

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever. - 1 John 2:15-17

The replacement of family life with social life has led modern man to be so integrated into the lives of others in employment, education, and even recreational situations that we can cringe in fear lest we trigger a negative reaction from someone. We frequently find ourselves in social situations where we are expected to resonate with the world and not with Christ.

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? - 2 Corinthians 6:14

A Christian can find he begins to excuse or justify what he does at work so as to not risk losing employment. A Christian can be pressured to remain silent for fear of getting people angry at him.

The process of worldly indoctrination can be seen in the acceptance of divorce, immorality, and even perversion that would have been unthinkable to even mention a few decades ago. Promiscuity was once considered shameful and virginity virtuous. Today they are reversed as chastity is mocked and even ridiculed.

Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! - Isaiah 5:20

The bible uses the word “woe” 98 times and it is never good. Educational systems are more geared for compliance forming than learning. Media serves to imprint values reinforced with the assumption that social momentum validates it (popularity = truth). It is so easy to accept that if everyone else thinks something, then we should accept it also. The flesh is drawn to that which is easy.

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. - Matthew 7:13-14

The flesh recoils from a difficult walk of life counter to the general flow. The flesh also is disinclined towards the effort to seek out and evaluate truth. Dying to self and selfishness requires a disengagement from the course of the world and charting an active and independent course. The world has been designed to make things fast, cheap, and easy, all the things that appeal to our flesh.

The pull the world exerts on our flesh can be countered by giving active effort to those things that appeal to the Spirit.

My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly. He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the way of his saints. Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path. When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul; Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee: - Proverbs 2:1-11

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. - Colossians 3:1-2

Since we can become so blind to the worldly and fleshly condition of our lives, it is essential to ask God to show us what needs to change so that we can follow him and die to self.

Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults. - Psalm 19:12

Chapter 8 - Aversion therapy

Paul received a commission from God that involved bringing the light of Jesus to the Gentiles.

To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me. Acts 26:18

There is a clarity that comes when one embraces truth. It can be seen with the Jews who came to realize that they contributed to putting to death their Messiah 50 days earlier.

Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? - Acts 2:26-37

The Christian who is awakening and having his eyes opened to truth frequently begins to see the way he lives his life as falling short of what he would like. Even worse, he recognizes his repeated failures to live the life he now sees as desirable.

For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. - Romans 7:14-15

There is a type of therapy where an electric shock is given to a person when he wants a cigarette such that he comes to associate the desire for a cigarette with a painful experience. This is called negative

reinforcement or aversion therapy. While this can be somewhat useful in training animals, the Christian should be encouraged to avoid this sort of correction for himself. For example, the Christian who berates himself for each failure may think he can summon enough will power to be more successful in the future. He does not understand that dying to self and selfishness is not accomplished by self-mastery.

There are some useful elements that can be extracted from failure analysis. Like the alcoholic who learns to avoid situations that might trigger indulgence, we can identify some of our individual vulnerabilities and minimize the frequency and degree of failure. While we can learn to minimize some of the worst aspects of our selfish nature, we are not going to be able to escape it on our own.

For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. - Romans 7:18

For a person to make changes in his life, he first needs to see that something is wrong, desire to correct it, and then learn how to. The Christian who begins to recognize the destructive nature of selfishness and even come to see that self on its own is harmful may begin to have a desire for change. It is when that desire reaches the level of taking action, that the Christian may find he is uncertain of what to do.

O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? - Romans 7:24

Chapter 9 - Love - The Opposite of Selfishness

Love has long patience, is kind; love is not emulous of others ; love is not insolent and rash, is not puffed up, does not behave in an unseemly manner, does not seek what is its own, is not quickly provoked, does not impute evil, does not rejoice at iniquity but rejoices with the truth, bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. - 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

The modern world has significantly distorted the word “love”. For example, teenagers are almost continually bombarded with messages picturing love as something that is fallen into or out of. They come to consider that the emotional sensations they experience of lust, desire, anticipation, and expectation are what is meant by “love”. This confusion often results in poor marriage decisions.

Real love is an act of will. A new mother who gets out of bed in the middle of the night to feed her newborn is illustrative of this self-sacrificial love. We can also see a demonstration of this love in the example of the Good Samaritan that was cited in answer to the question of how one would love his neighbor as himself..

But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise. - Luke 10:37

The goal of Christian maturity is love.

Whereas the object and purpose of our instruction and charge is love, which springs from a pure heart and a good (clear) conscience and sincere (unfeigned) faith. - 1 Timothy 1:5

The process of dying to self is a process of replacing selfishness with the self-sacrificial character of love.

Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: - 1 Peter 1:22

It is interesting to note that there is a process of “soul purification” accomplished by “obeying” truth resulting in “unfeigned love” of the brethren. This sheds light on how we are able to “die to self”. We might imagine our soul attached to the flesh and pulled to follow after the world. As we submit and comply with truth, our soul becomes less attached to the flesh and more attached to the spirit to be directed by the Holy Spirit. As selfishness has less and less claim on our heart, we are able to consider others and act in service to them demonstrating love.

Chapter 10 - The Cold Light of Truth

And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. - John 3:19

Selfishness seldom welcomes truth. It might tolerate truth regarding the failings of others, but draws the line regarding self. How we react to truth tells us a lot about what is in our heart. The flesh is driven by feelings. Truth exposes our failings and often results in bad feelings.

The truth will set you free, but first it will make you miserable. - James A. Garfield

The movie *The Matrix* centered around a character who awakens to discover that what he thought was his “real” life was an artificial one and that he was actually just a slumbering component in a large organic network. In a way this can be seen as descriptive of the comfortable image of our life our flesh gives us to keep us from facing the discomfort of truth.

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. - 1 John 1:8

The Christian should understand how intensely our flesh fights against truth. What is called “back-sliding” is simply the strength of our old nature wanting to make us feel good.

But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. - 2 Peter 1:9

Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: - Revelation 3:17

For many the first steps towards truth is to begin to see who God is and how great he is.

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding. - Proverbs 9:10

Often the next thing to be illuminated by truth is our own wretchedness.

I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes. - Job 42:5-6

Our souls are purified by using our will to choose truth. This usually comes about as we change that which we value. As comfort, prestige, riches, and ease become less valuable to us than wisdom, truth, and nearness to the Lord, we find that the problems incumbent with a life lived for self begin to diminish.

Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding. - Proverbs 23:23

Chapter 11 - The Process of Christian Maturity

That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: - Ephesians 4:14-15

We have seen that the process of dying to self and selfishness starts with the perception of the truth of who God is and in contrast, who we are.

I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: - Matthew 3:11

The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. - Matthew 8:8

We can see that the only honest reaction to truth is humility. It is at this point where God is able to work in us with his grace.

But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. - James 4:6

The grace of God is often only thought of as the initial saving faith we have to first trust in Jesus. We need to consider how critical this continuing grace is to live the Christian life.

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; - Titus 2:11-12

As we are guided by the Holy Spirit and surrender ourselves to his work in us, we should begin to see some of the change that happens as the flesh is no longer fed. One way to measure the degree to which we have achieved selflessness is to measure the fruit of the Spirit in our lives.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. - Galatians 5:22-23

The work of the Spirit in us is hindered by the free reign we give to our flesh;

This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would - Galatians 5:16-17

Dying to self is hindered by that of the flesh to which we hold. It can be helpful to inventory those things to which we cling that hinder (or quench) the work of the Holy Spirit in us.

Christian maturity can sometimes parallel physical maturity. Those who are young often have enthusiasm and ambition that propel them into various learning experiences. As the years pass stability becomes a more prominent feature. With age a gradual disconnection from striving and contention precedes the culmination of a life. Sometimes the surrender of self only occurs when it becomes obvious that self cannot continue.

A life lived in selfless love concludes with earthly emptiness, but heavenly rewards.

Chapter 12 - How important is life

For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? - Matthew 16:26

It is difficult to think of a single possession valued more highly than life. People will fight, even kill, or impoverish themselves to preserve it. However, Christians are shown that we should not be overly concerned with it.

For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. - Matthew 16:25

The life Christians find in Jesus is eternal life. This is life that cannot be lost.

For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. - Romans 6:23

One of the main tactics of Satan is to deceive us into thinking we should try to control things that we really cannot control. He has suggested we attempt to control the climate, government, and other people. With such ambitious undertaking, it is understandable to see that some come to think they can

control even their life. We should not forget much less attempt to usurp the authority of God.

The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. - 1 Samuel 2:6

Our flesh recognizes that death is the end of sensation and seeks actively to avoid it. The Christian knows that this life is transient and that a far better one awaits.

If, however, it is to be life in the flesh and I am to live on here, that means fruitful service for me; so I can say nothing as to my personal preference [I cannot choose], But I am hard pressed between the two. My yearning desire is to depart (to be free of this world, to set forth) and be with Christ, for that is far, far better; But to remain in my body is more needful and essential for your sake. - Philippians 1:22-24 AMP

If the only thing that mattered to God was our salvation, then as soon as a person became a Christian he would die. It would be cruel to leave a redeemed person in a sinful world. The reason Christians continue in this physical life is to minister to others in the work of the Lord.

And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death. - Revelation 12:10-11

The Christian who can consider his own death with the same wistful detachment Paul did in his letter to the Philippians has achieved a major step towards dying to self.

Chapter 13 - How important is family

If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. - Luke 14:26-27

Jesus is not advocating hatred of family members. There are two factors to add clarity to the verses in Luke. The first element is context. There is a banquet where a guy makes what was probably a common toast.

And when one of them that sat at meat with him heard these things, he said unto him, Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God. - Luke 14:15

To this Jesus responds with a story about people making excuses when invited to a great feast. The man giving the feast was angry that those invited begged off. He then told his servants to compel the blind, maimed, and poor to come to the feast instead.

The purpose of this story was to illustrate to the guy who made the toast that the casual assumption that any Israelite would automatically be in the kingdom of God, was mistaken. The second element that adds clarity is translation. Here a word for word translation misses a little of what the sentence would have meant to a Greek hearer.

If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters in the event that they become hindrances to his supreme love for me, yes, moreover also his own life in the same manner, he is not able to be my disciple. And whoever is not taking up and carrying his

own cross and coming after me, is not able to be my disciple. - Luke 14:26-27 Wuest

Families are important. God created them. Satan has put a lot of effort over centuries in crippling them. They can be a source of much affection. However, they can also be a source of hindrance.

Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division: For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. - Luke 12:51-53

An illustration of the hindrance a family can be seen in the example of a child who is a young adult and visits home and tells the parents he became a Christian. If the parents or other siblings are not Christian, they might act to pressure the young person to be quiet, or even change their view.

Essentially Jesus is saying that not everyone who thinks they are going to waltz into the kingdom of God is going to. In fact some will face opposition even from their own family which they will have to overcome by placing greater value on Jesus. Jesus even adds that one's own life can be a hindrance if it is valued as more important than Jesus.

Chapter 14 - Fire sale - All things must go

Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, - Philippians 3:8

Dying to self requires the detachment from everything in this life. It is not a rejection or severing, but a change in perspective. Consider the rich young ruler who could not imagine the loss of his riches.

Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me. And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich. - Luke 18:22-23

A rich person does not have to surrender everything he has, but he has to be willing to. God may lead a person with abundant resources to use them in his work. God may ask us to surrender what we consider most valuable.

And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of. - Genesis 22:2

Abraham gives us an example of someone willing to sacrifice everything to the Lord. However, his faith was such that he expected that his son would be returned to him.

And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you. - Genesis 22:5

Job is an interesting example. He had his wealth, family and even health taken from him. We might see in him a sterling example of having died to self. However, like dross in a refining process, a little pride finally comes to the surface.

My glory was fresh in me, and my bow was renewed in my hand. Unto me men gave ear, and waited, and kept silence at my counsel. After my words they spake not again; and my speech dropped upon them. - Job 29:20-21

It is only towards the end when Job has let go of everything, that one might consider he had died to self.

THEN JOB said to the Lord, I know that You can do all things, and that no thought or purpose of Yours can be restrained or thwarted. [You said to me] Who is this that darkens and obscures counsel [by words] without knowledge? Therefore [I now see] I have [rashly] uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. - Job 42:1-3 AMP

Chapter 15 - Hunger and Thirst

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. - Matthew 5:6

The flesh drives us with a hunger for sensation. The Spirit fills us with a hunger for righteousness. If we were to consider "righteousness", we might think in terms of good works such as writing a check to a church or charity. However, there is a deeper connection when we are able to minister directly as individuals.

For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward. - Mark 9:41

There is much we could do for our brothers and sisters in Christ if we took the time to cultivate relationships through which we could know of their needs.

If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? - James 2:15-16

One can think of selfishness as taking in and selflessness as giving out. As we transition from the former to the latter, we cross a point of ambivalence. The phrase "hunger and thirst" pictures an intensity of desire that indicates the passionate engagement of will. As passionate as an alcoholic can "thirst" for his next drink, we should be "thirsting" for righteousness.

Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. - Titus 2:14

If we let the flesh have free reign in our lives, we find ourselves drawn into the intense pursuit of sensations to fulfill various lusts. As the influence of the flesh declines from starvation, its passions likewise diminish. We become more able to stir up zealotry for the Lord. Modern Christian practice often conveys the idea of compliant inert pew filling Christianity. Whereas in the bible we get more of an idea of active and even diligent seeking.

But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and

that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. - Hebrews 11:6

Dying to self compasses more than just self-denial. It is a replacement of selfishness with a zealous concern for and ministry to others. As we draw nearer to Christ and submit to being formed in his image, we should expect that we also would take on his concern for and ministry to others.

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: - Philippians 2:5

Chapter 16 - The Renewed Mind

That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. - Ephesians 4:22-24

A pivotal point in the transition from the flesh to the Spirit (from selfishness to selflessness) is the renewal of our mind. This is essentially a software change. The values we held in our mind to serve the flesh are replaced with ones that serve the Spirit. For example, we may have looked at a young woman immodestly dressed to stimulate the flesh by lusting after her. A renewed mind might observe the same woman and feel sorrow for one so desperate for attention.

Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; - 1 Peter 1:13-15

Each observation and judgment we make is accumulated in our heart. Our heart accumulates these and inclines us in a certain direction in life. A mind that has not been “renewed” may continue to pour into the heart observations as to the value of things in terms of how well they stimulate self. A renewed mind will start to fill the heart with observations about what is true. This truth versus feeling orientation is a key distinction.

That each one of you should know how to possess (control, manage) his own body in consecration (purity, separated from things profane) and honor, Not [to be used] in the passion of lust like the heathen, who are ignorant of the true God and have no knowledge of His will, - 1 Thessalonians 4:4-5

The backslider in heart [from God and from fearing God] shall be filled with [the fruit of] his own ways, and a good man shall be satisfied with [the fruit of] his ways [with the holy thoughts and actions which his heart prompts and in which he delights]. - Proverbs 14:14 AMP

For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he: - Proverbs 23:7a

There is that about renewal that requires our appeal to God.

Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. - Psalm 51:10

There is also that in regard to renewal that requires our effort.

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. - Romans 12:2

There is a picture of a continuing process of renewal.

For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. - 2 Corinthians 4:16

Chapter 17 - Truth versus Feelings

There are many activities in which we engage that are rather mundane. We have to work to provide for food, clothing, and shelter. It is often tempting to segregate our thoughts into lofty ones about ideals, religion, or truth and more pragmatic thoughts about daily living. This is a common way we avoid applying truth to ourselves.

We might ambitiously contend for a promotion at work telling ourselves that the financial increase would be good for our family. However, we can fall into seeking that which appeals to the flesh by deceiving ourselves with noble justification. Work promotions can appeal to prestige, power, and the things more money can purchase. The deficit of increased time away from family and the values that imparts to one's children are often minimized in one's mind.

The decision to put one's children in public school as opposed to the expense and effort of homeschooling can reflect a self-oriented priority similar to the decision not to have children at all. It can be difficult to consider truth if it suggests that we might be in error or have less than noble motives. Like the drunkard faced with the loss of alcohol or the addict facing withdrawal, the flesh is reluctant to allow anything that might threaten it.

There are two methods of transitioning from the flesh to the Spirit. The first is to slowly reflect on our motives and actions in light of truth. This usually results in a gradual letting go of the layers of self-serving motives we have accumulated in life.

The second method is a drastic one of mentally stripping away of every thought, value, and opinion as if we had died and stand naked before God. At this point we add on to ourselves that of which we feel the Lord would approve.

Both techniques represent "dying" to self. The second method is not often selected but rather may be forced onto one by harsh circumstances.

Modern times have been designed to elevate the flesh through things like "self-esteem", affirmations, "positive thinking", and advertising. It has been said that stories are more powerful than facts because they touch the heart more than the mind. Our feelings serve a useful purpose when they allow us to enjoy life or even warn us when something is wrong. Feelings serve a malignant purpose when they lock us into a cycle of self-stimulation or motivate us to distort truth to sustain the comfort of delusion. For this reason feelings need to be subordinate to truth.

who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart. - Psalm 15:1b-2

Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom. - Psalm 51:6

Truth can have an almost surgical effect on the fleshly inclinations of the heart.

By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil. - Proverbs 16:6

Selfishness leads to distortions of truth from which increasingly greater iniquities flow. The influence of others compounds the problems of our enslavement to the deceptions of the flesh.

Take ye heed every one of his neighbour, and trust ye not in any brother: for every brother will utterly supplant, and every neighbour will walk with slanders. And they will deceive every one his neighbour, and will not speak the truth: they have taught their tongue to speak lies, and weary themselves to commit iniquity. Thine habitation is in the midst of deceit; through deceit they refuse to know me, saith the LORD. - Jerimiah 9:4-6

The bible calls four things “truth”, the bible itself, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and God. While the Holy Spirit leads us in truth, we have the opportunity to abide (live) in the words of God and receive a constant source of truth.

Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. - John 8:31-32

Jesus is called the “word” of God and there is an element of vitality such that the “living word” works inside of us.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. - Colossians 3:16

For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. - Isaiah 55:10-11

God’s word is truth and it is alive and sent to work in us to accomplish what God wills. This work requires our active participation. One measure of the extent to which we have died to self is our interest in God’s word. If it is a chore to even read a sort passage in the bible, we may not have made much progress. If we get a concordance or use computer software like esword to dig into the bible to try to understand word studies or topics, it may reflect more progress God’s word has had working in us.

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. - Psalm 119:105

Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word. - Psalm 119:9

Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me. - Psalm 119:133

Once God's word (truth) enters in and works in transforming us, our feelings also transition from the sensual to the sublime.

Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart. - Psalm 32:11

Chapter 18 - The end of flesh

We can see that all flesh ends in death. The Greeks expended much thought wrangling with various philosophies of how to maximize the pleasures of the flesh. Seeing nothing beyond the grave, they understandably saw obtaining the greatest pleasure in this life as the best they could hope for.

However, even maximum pleasures ultimately fail to satisfy. There is a world weariness summarized by the character in a movie who said that he could participate in any romantic activity with an urbanity born of disinterest.

Having a family and children begins to draw us out of the gloomy end selfishness brings us to. Even if a person has never heard of God, he can recognize the soul satisfying reward of giving to his children and receiving their thanks and affection. In a way, familial love and affection point towards the love God extends to us.

Christ is our example in all things. His example of selfless love when he laid his life down for our sakes is the ultimate example of selflessness.

But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. - Romans 5:8

Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. - Philippians 2:6-8

The flesh resists the loss of all that it values. The death of self and the surrender of all that we have is the only way to receive all that God has to give us. All that life can give us will pass away. All that God can give us will last forever.

As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labour, which he may carry away in his hand. - Ecclesiastes 5:15

But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: - Matthew 6:20

All flesh ends in death. Without the salvation and eternal life found in Jesus, our dying bodies would drag our souls into the second death. As Christians, we can escape this fate because we have a

reconstituted spirit by which we have within us the life of Christ and thus eternal life.

These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.—1 John 5:13

Dying to self and selfishness is part of the process of Christian maturity. It is not with teeth clenched that we summon the steely determination to quash the flesh. It is with brokenness and a humble heart that we acknowledge our need for help.

Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.—Hebrews 4:16

All too often in our Christian life we come to regard our spiritual life as similar to fairy tales, space aliens, and ghosts. It is something we have a slight familiarity with, but is so distant from our actual lives that it seems fanciful and irrelevant.

Life in this body of flesh will end.

So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. - 1 Corinthians 15:42-44

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.—1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

We know that riches are deceitful, that there will be false teachers, and that the world will hate us. We can even be deceived with our own sin.

But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. - Hebrews 3:13

For the Christian who desires to advance in his faith, the first step is to see Jesus as substantive and living within us. We have to come to the point of view that Jesus is real and the life he offers us is real. There are forces that would have us see the artificial world Satan has crafted as real and Christianity as some fiction.

The sword of truth can free us from the deceptions that would keep us from drawing nearer our Lord. We need to consider this within the context of how short our life really is.

Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.—Ephesians 5:16