

Dying to self

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Date: 01 March 2009

[0 : 00] I want to give you this morning an offensive message. It's offensive. The Bible says the cross is an offense.

! And this is a message about the cross. It's about the cross in every believers life. It's about dying to self. Firstly, think about how our world portrays the message of self-esteem. Self-esteem. The State of California has authorized US\$750,000 to study whether there's a relationship between a lack of self-esteem and social problems.

They've undertaken these studies. There's various studies being undertaken. And from one of these studies, there's a reporter who wrote this. He said, there is precious little evidence that self-esteem is the cause of our social ills.

Those social scientists looked hard, but they could detect essentially no cause and effect link between self-esteem and problematic behaviour, whether it's teen pregnancy, drug use or child abuse.

[1 : 17] Another study was done by some 200 criminals by St. Elizabeth's Hospital in the US, and it led them to the conclusion that there was not a single criminal who believed he was evil.

Every criminal thought of himself as basically a good person, even while planning a crime. So these criminals, they have good self-esteem. This is a study by this Professor Balmester is his name. He's done this study and he's found that people with high self-esteem tend to have low self-control. And his excellent research, it lays this self-esteem myth to waste.

Criminals, he has discovered, do not suffer from low self-esteem. They are not acting out their outrage at being oppressed, suppressed and abused. They are dangerous because they are narcissists.

They believe that what they want, they deserve to have and the end justifies the means. I guess you could think in some ways that some of the behaviour at times like last night at the youth group, where you've got some, you just can't tell them anything.

[2 : 26] They've got very good self-esteem. They're very self-assertive. They won't let anyone tell them anything because they've got a high self-esteem. So getting self-esteem is not the answer.

This Professor Balmester, he found that spouse abusers, gang members and violent members, violent criminals all have high self-esteem.

And yet this is what our world is telling everybody. In the justice system, in the correction system, they're encouraging people to get high self-esteem. And you're even seeing it in the Christian bookshops.

Has there ever been a greater proliferation of books on self available than we see today? Even as I say in Christian bookshops. Self-esteem, self-image, self-confidence, self-assertion and self-love. They've become instant bestsellers. And there are many books about self-worth with titles like Love Yourself. The Art of Learning to Love Yourself. Celebrate Yourself.

[3 : 30] Self-esteem. Building an adequate self-concept. Improving your self-image. A biblical view of self-acceptance. Now, you contrast that with what the Bible actually says and warns us.

Paul says in the last days in 2 Timothy 3 verse 2 that in the last days one of the features of the last days will be that it will be an age where men will be lovers of themselves.

Lovers of themselves. Now, of course, we know there's a healthy feeling, comfy about yourself and so on. There's an element of that. But when the focus, when the total focus and priority is on lifting yourself, then there's a danger there.

It's not biblical. It's not something that we should put a focus on. There's an old time preacher called Vance Habner. He said this, he said, The devil is not fighting religion. He's too smart for that.

He's producing a counterfeit Christianity. So much like the real one that good Christians are afraid to speak out against it. We are plainly told in the scriptures that in the last days men will not endure sound doctrine and will depart from the truth and heap to themselves teachers to tickle their ears.

[4 : 43] We live in an epidemic of this itch. And popular preachers have developed ear tickling to a fine art. And today the angle is to avoid negative preaching and accentuate only the positive.

Now for example you've got preachers on the airways, on the TV channels, that it's all positive, positive, positive. And yet there's a danger there that we're missing the truth that the Lord Jesus is urging us to have and get self in the right perspective.

As we see in John 12, 24, the Lord Jesus, John 12, 24, he says, Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone.

But if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it, and he that hateth his life shall keep it unto life eternal.

There's a lot of profound truth in those verses there. A little seed, a little seed, one little seed. That one little seed is not going to do much unless it die.

[5 : 52] The seed pod has to be broken. The seed has to be destroyed. As it goes into the ground it dies. And every farmer knows that this is how life comes, as the seed is broken.

Without that it will bring forth nothing. And the Lord Jesus compares this for us, for you and I, that we must die in order to bring forth life.

We must die to ourselves in order to have his life in us. For fruit to happen the seed has to break.

And likewise too, as God's people, as people here today, our life is found in dying to ourselves, in our own ways, in our own trusting in our own ego, in dying to our ego, in dying to our self, in dying to our fleshly desires.

Matthew 16, 24. Matthew 16, 24. Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

For whosoever will save his life shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his sake for my sake shall find it. There is a letting go, and an embracing of his will.

[7 : 12] You know, when someone is on the way to the cross, it means they are a condemned man. And the fact that in our terminology, in our way of thinking, would be if you are on the way to the electric chair.

If they had the, in our nation, or whatever form of execution, when you are taking up your cross, it means you are a condemned man. You are dead. Or just about dead. You are on the way to death. And A.W. Tozer, he said, A victorious Christian neither exalts nor downgrades himself. His interests have shifted from self to Christ. What he is or is not, no longer concerns him.

He believes that he has been crucified with Christ, and he is not willing either to praise or deprecate such a man. So, in other words, Christ in you. That's what matters.

Galatians 2, 20. The Lord says through Paul, I am crucified with Christ. Nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. And the life which I now live, I live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

[8 : 21] What a profound truth again. Paul says, I am crucified with Christ. I no longer live. The old Paul is dead and buried. Someone wrote this, We are so addicted to self, so wrapped up in self, so entwined with self, so infatuated with self, that our spiritual desires cannot be centered in God.

This is the secret of the cross. It does violence to corrupt human nature. It slays the old flesh, the self-life. The cross is where we must go to find life.

Paul says in Galatians 5, And they that are Christ have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. Have you been to the cross? Can you see Christ there, pierced for you, bleeding for you, dying, dead for you, and then alive, resurrected, risen, ascended, praying for you still at this very moment.

The cross is a place to go through to find life. The question is for everyone here today, are you dead or alive? Dead or alive?

The cross is the place we have to go. It's a place of humility. The cross is the place of humility. Instead of having to focus on our agenda, and our ego, and our rights, and our desires, and our convenience, being a Christian means the focus gets shifted onto what God wants for our lives.

[9 : 59] What is God's will? What is God's desire? Sometimes we are a bit like people who wear these headsets, you know, these iPods and everything.

And they turn up full blast. And they are walking along, and someone is trying to talk to them. And he, I can't hear you! I can't hear you! You know? I take the earphones off.

And sometimes we can't hear God, because the self is so loud. The self is so loud that we can't hear Him. The self is so all-consuming and all-engaging that we can't hear God's Word.

And sometimes we've got to turn the volume down on self. Turn our own self-will, our own self-desires, our own self-priorities, and instead tune in to God.

Turn the self down. Turn the volume down of self. And that means surrendering our things. It means surrendering what's convenient for us. Think of missionaries who go to other lands.

[11 : 05] You know, that takes something special, doesn't it? To lead the comforts, the conveniences, the pleasures, the ease, the carefree life, and to go into an unknown.

Into something that's beyond our comprehension. And some of these step out without any guarantees of being able to afford it.

You know, they have sold out. They've sold out the self, and they've given their all to Him. And friends, what a challenge that is to us. We read of one missionary, David Livingstone. And one day, a missionary society wrote to David Livingstone. You know, he's the one that they said someone met him in the jungle, and they said the myth goes, or the legend goes, Dr Livingstone I presume, in the middle of the jungle of Africa.

He was a missionary, he went there for Christ. He was a doctor I understand too. But he went there for Christ as a missionary, as an ambassador of Christ. And this missionary organisation wrote to David Livingstone one day, and they said, Have you found a good road to where you are?

[12 : 15] If so, we want to send other men to join you. Livingstone replied, if you have men who will come only if there is a good road, I don't want them.

You know, it's not that it's convenient. He didn't want those who just wanted to come because it was convenient. He wanted those who would come no matter what. So let go of our own convenience. That's surrender, isn't it? The surrender of relinquishing our all, of surrendering to the Lord and His authority and His control. Livingstone knew that such men would not last when the going would get really tough.

They simply would not make the needed sacrifices. There's a verse in Colossians 3, 5, I'm going to paraphrase somewhat. You want, mortify or put to death therefore, the members that parts your body, put to death your body.

And these things, he goes on in Colossians 3, 5, fornication, uncleanness or impurity, lust, desire, greed, which is idolatry, covetousness, which is idolatry.

[13 : 24] Put to death those things. They are of the flesh. Grieve, idolatry, lust, impurity. Put it to death, Paul says. Mortify, put it to death.

You know, there's the people that deal with death, they're called morticians. Morticians, they deal with dead bodies. Paul says, mortify, put it to death. Put your body to death. So that, it's like some of us said, if you go and talk to a, if you go down the, the morgue in the hospital, and you pull out the, the table that the dead body's on, and you, and you talk really nasty to that dead body. Yet you're saying he's a lousy, good for nothing, rotten, stinking sinner. And there's no reaction. He's dead. And you can go to that dead body and say he's the most wonderful person, and he's done all these great things and praise him up.

And there's no reaction. There's no effect because the body is dead. That's how we ought to be. Dead to, to, uh, glory of men. Dead to criticism of men.

God wants you to be like that. So that you don't react in the flesh. You know, sometimes we react in the flesh, don't we? I'm sure none of you do, but, but, you know, I know Julie knows I do sometimes.

[14 : 40] But, but sometimes you react in the flesh when things aren't how you want them to be. When things aren't just so, you get rankled or frustrated, or someone doesn't smile at you in church this morning.

You get up, you know, uppity and frustrated, or, you know, oh, brother, son, so never spoke to me today. Why don't you go and speak to him? You know, people get upset about the most trivial things, especially in church.

You know? It shouldn't be, should it? I mean, of course you're a saintly, but that never happens to you. But, you know, it can happen, can't it? And then people get upset. And they leave a church because someone didn't pat them on the back, or didn't acknowledge the little job that they did, or they didn't feel praised up enough, or, or pampered enough.

Or, the preacher had a go at me today. Oh, he just got under my skin. I'm not going back there again. And it's the flesh. It's the flesh, brother. It's the flesh system. I've got a lot of flesh.

I'll tell you now. But we need to surrender, don't we? And learn to crucify the flesh. Paul said, I die daily. And surrender to God's agenda for our lives. And it's that, going to that own personal journey

to Calvary.

[15 : 48] One asked George Mueller, that great man of God who raised up a wonderful orphanage and ministered to lots of children that were hard done by and trusted the Lord in miraculous ways through prayer.

And somebody asked George Mueller what was his secret? What was the secret of his service? And he said, there was a day when I died. And he spoke, he bent lower until he almost touched the floor and he continued.

He said, there was a day when I died. Died to George Mueller. His opinions, his preferences, tastes, his will.

Died to the world and its approval or censure. Died to the approval or blame, even of my brethren or friends. And since then, I have studied to show myself approved unto God.

There was a day that I died. That's what it's like. When you become a real genuine Christian, when you become a real Christian, it doesn't matter. Your flesh dies.

[16 : 56] And of course, it's still there. You've got to beat it and battle it and fight it, as we know. But bring it into subjection. Here's a quote. The victorious believer will become aware of different forms of self to deal with.

We shall discover in our service for... This can happen. I'm sorry to put this in the right context now. That even the good things that you do, you can have self there to fight and battle with.

For example, even in your service for Christ, self-confidence and self-esteem. You've got to fight that. In the slightest suffering, we can have self-saving and self-pity.

In the least misunderstanding, we can respond with self-defence and self-vindication. In our loss in life, we can be self-pleasing and self-choosing. In our relationships, it can be self-assertiveness and self-respect.

In our education, it can be self-boasting and self-expression. In our desires, it can be self-admiration and self-congratulations. Even in our failures, we can have self-excusing and self-justification.

[18 : 05] In our... You know, there's all of these areas. We've got to guard against self, even when things are going right. And when we're doing our best for God, we can congratulate ourselves and big-note ourselves and...

How do they do it? You know, we can think we're such a great thing, but really we need to have a humility of mind, don't we? Every one of us, in whatever we do, we just...

Anything that we are is by His grace. You know, there but for the grace of God would have been me. Lost as hell. It's only His grace that's made us who we are today.

And the Lord Jesus, whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. In the Roman Empire, they crucified a criminal or captive, and that victim was forced to carry his cross, part of the way to the crucifixion site.

Are you carrying a cross? Are you ready to lay it all on the line to be a living sacrifice? Here's a quote about dying to self. What it means, someone put this really aptly, and I'll quote this.

[19 : 11] When you are forgotten, or neglected, or purposefully set at naught, yet you don't sting and hurt with the insult or the oversight, but your heart is happy, being counted worthy to suffer for Christ, that's dying to self.

When your good is evil is evil, when your good is evil, when your good is evil spoken of, when your wishes are crossed, your advice is disregarded, your opinions ridiculed, and you refuse to let anger rise in your heart, or even defend yourself, but take it all patient in loving silence, that's dying to self. When you are lovingly and patiently bear any disorder, any annoyance, when you stand face to face with waste, folly, extravagance, and endure it as Jesus endured, that's dying to self.

When you are content with any food or clothing, or offering, or climate, or society, or any interruption by the will of God, that's dying to self. When you never care to refer to yourself in conversation, or record your own good works, or rich after commendations, when you can truly love to be unknown, that's dying to self.

When you can see your brother prosper, and have his needs met, and can honestly rejoice, and feel no envy, nor question God, while your own needs are far greater, and in desperate circumstance, that's dying to self.

[20 : 34] Dying to self. When you can receive correction and reproof, from one of less stature than yourself, and can humbly, inwardly submit, as well as outwardly, finding no rebellion or resentment,

rising up in your heart, that's dying to self.

You know there's an Aussie saying, isn't there, he's full of himself, she's full of herself. Self, self, self, self, self, self. It's all they think about, all they talk about.

You have a conversation with them, and it's, oh, this, that, and the other, this is what I'm doing, this is what I'm feeling, this is what I'm, I'm, I'm, I'm, I'm. Ego, ego, ego, self, self, self.

Brothers and sisters, think about the other people. Think about those, the word says to, to consider others interests, and, and needs, and, and their feelings, and their situation more than your own.

To put others above yourself. Paul says, that I may know him, that I may know him. And as we are made conformable unto his death, as we become more submitted and surrendered to what his will is, as we take up our own cross, he will guide us in the decisions of life.

[21 : 47] About this saying, take up your cross and follow me, a preacher John McCaffrey, he says what to do about taking up your cross and following me. He says this, Jesus set the standard as total self-denial.

In Luke 14, 26, a great multitude were following him. He turned and spoke to them, he says, if anyone comes after me, meaning those who want to be his true followers, and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.

Now that's strong words, isn't it? Of course he's gauging it in terms of, our love for God must be the ultimate, the priority. And everything else pales into secondary, into insignificant.

And interesting there, isn't it, that he says, hate yourself. He doesn't say love yourself, get self-esteem and elevate yourself. He says, self-hate.

John McCaffrey goes on, what a powerful truth. Following Jesus is not about you and me being a Christian. It's not about our self-esteem. It's about our being sick of our sin and our desperation for forgiveness.

[23 : 00] You know, sometimes when we elevate self, really we are elevating our own sinful ways and our own opinions and way of living. But God wants you to be like that grain of wheat.

To come to the end of yourself and so to find the life that he can bring, the true life, the true way of living that he and only he can offer to us. Dying to self.

It's a gradual thing. It's a step-by-step. Maybe it's sometimes one step forward, two steps back. As we learn and grow and make mistakes and fall and pick ourselves up again.

It happens in little ways. Every act of humility involves dying to pride. Think of that. Every act of humility involves dying to pride. Every act of courage involves dying to cowardice.

Every act of kindness involves dying to cruelty. Every act of cruelty. Every act of love involves dying to selfishness. And so the false self dies and the true self, made in God's image, is born and nurtured.

[24 : 03] It is by giving that we receive. It is by forgiving that we are forgiven. It is by dying that we are born to eternal life. And the great need today is not some greater self-esteem or self-image or self-confidence or self-assertion.

But it's by placing our dependence upon Him. It's putting our surrender in His hands. To surrender our lives into the hands of the God of the universe who made us.

Who gave His Son for us. That through believing in His name we can have everlasting life. Life with a capital L. Life to the max. Life more abundant and full.

And then we can go forward boasting not in ourself but in Christ who is made unto us. Our wisdom, our righteousness, our redemption, our strength. Everything.

Christ is made unto us. All of those things that really count. And brothers and sisters today, I just want to urge everyone that you can experience this life.

[25 : 05] This life, maybe you're still a little bit like a seed pod. You know, you're still all wrapped up in yourself. You've never come to that place where you're willing to say, Yes, Lord.

I surrender. I come humbly and bow to your will, to your way. To Calvary. To experience Calvary personally today.

And I pray that each one might know that. What it means to realise that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. That He rose again. And that we can come to know Him personally as our Saviour and Master.

The one who makes life worth living. The one who makes life make sense. The one who can give us everlasting life. And as we are saved, we can grow from glory to glory.

From step to step. Closer and closer. As we draw nearer to God, He'll draw nearer to us. And we'll be more like Him. We'll have that Spirit of Christ in us. That makes life meaningful.

[26 : 06] And friends, I urge you to put your trust in Him today. Let us pray. Lord, we thank you today that you love us. In Calvary, you died at that cross for our sin.

So we can have everlasting life. So that our sin could be nailed. And treated. And killed. And Lord, help us that each one might know that life that you bring.

That new life of Calvary. That born again life. As we receive that new birth. As we put our faith and trust in you. Lord, and that we might walk in that newness of life.

Help us, Lord, to see those needs in our life. To realize when self rears its ugly head. And when our self and our selfish ways and our selfish thinking just overrules and overrides what you would have. Help us, Lord, to see the needs of others around about. To think of others more than ourselves. To love our neighbour more than our self. Lord, to help us to have that Spirit of Christ in each day we pray.

[27 : 06] In Jesus' name, Amen.