

# CHAPTER 2

## AUTHENTIC LETHAL DISCIPLESHIP

### —A DEATH—

#### AN EXPOSITORY STUDY OF *MARK 8:27-38*

#### PREFACE TO CHAPTER 2

The Author makes no apologies for two consecutive chapters on Christian cross bearing. This Chapter 2 and the next Chapter 3 deal with Jesus' instruction to His disciples and the multitude concerning denying oneself, taking up one's own cross, and following Him on a road filled with a self-emptying. This Chapter 2 considers Mark's rendering of Jesus' teaching on disciples' cross bearing, while Chapter 3 has Luke's emphasis. Though they both relate the same incident and teaching, they are quite different and our consideration of each is distinct also.

Jesus taught this cross bearing as an absolute requirement for any who profit from His cross bearing. Therefore, it is worthy of being repeated and reemphasized as the fundamental duty of authentic Christian discipleship. None other single theme so properly clarifies what true Christianity embodies.

In the Preface of Volume I in this series on authentic Christian discipleship, we attempted to single out the most dominate lack in modern Christendom. Its single most prevalent fault appears to be its unreal and untrue representation of just what true Christianity consists. What today's world thinks of Christianity is far removed from any concept of cross bearing. Christendom is artificially enlarged and has a scandalous morality that is steeped in sin and saturated with selfism. Since cross bearing is such a vital part of the real Christian experience, and since Christ taught it exclusively and resolutely, we will also.

This first study of Jesus' teaching on cross bearing is somewhat introductory to Chapter 3. In this chapter Mark makes clear its necessity, its features, and its sense. Chapter 3 reemphasizes these three clarifications in a slightly different fashion, but adds what Luke does throughout his presentation of Jesus: Luke explains how only the rationalization of Christ's cross—its rationality—produces cross bearing in fallen humans. Both Mark and Luke were led to make cross bearing clear in their respective Gospels ; and together they make His and our crosses understandable, and that when understood, perceived, and appreciated, His Cross will work a devotion in the souls of all who thus assimilate its effects and appreciate its beauty. All who perceive clearly His Cross, will without exception deny themselves, take up their own crosses, and follow Jesus on His road of self-sacrifice. Amen.

## CROSS BEARING

(An Excerpt from a Paper by Arthur W. Pink)

“The Christian life is a life that consists of following Jesus. ‘If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.’ Oh that you and I may gain distinction for the closeness of our walk to Christ, and then shall we be ‘close communists’ indeed. There is a class described in Scripture of whom it is said, ‘These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.’ But sad to say, there is another class, and a large class, who seem to follow the Lord fitfully, spasmodically, half-heartedly, occasionally, distantly. There is much of the World and much of self in their lives and so little of Christ. Thrice happy shall he be who like Caleb followeth the Lord fully.

‘Then said Jesus unto His disciples, if any man will’—the word ‘will’ here means ‘desire to’ just as in that verse, ‘If any will live godly.’ It signifies ‘determine to.’ ‘If any man will or desires to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross (not a cross, but his cross) and follow me.’ Then in Luke 14:27 Christ declared, ‘And whosoever doth

not bear his cross, and come after Me, cannot be My disciple.’ So it is not optional. The Christian life is far more than subscribing to a system of truth or adopting a code of conduct, or of submitting to religious ordinances. Preeminently the Christian life is a person; experience of fellowship with the Lord Jesus, and just in proportion as your life is lived in communion with Christ, to that extent are you living the Christian life, and to that extent only.

Have we begun to ‘take up the cross’ at all? Is there any wonder that we are following Him at such a distance? Is there any wonder that we have such little victory over the power of indwelling sin? There is a reason for that. Mediatorially the Cross of Christ stands alone, but experimentally the cross is to be shared by all His disciples. Legally the cross of Calvary annulled and put away our guilt, the guilt of our sins; but, my friends, I am perfectly convinced that the only way of getting deliverance from the power of sin in our lives and obtaining mastery over the old man within us, is by the cross becoming a part of the experience of our souls. It was at the cross sin was dealt with legally and judicially: it is only as the cross is ‘taken up’ by the disciple that it becomes an experience—slaying the power and defilement of sin within us. And Christ says, ‘Whosoever doth not bear his cross, cannot be My disciple.’ Oh what need has each Christian now to get alone with the Master and consecrate himself to His service.”<sup>1</sup>

May these studies on cross bearing be plunged into with perseverance and diligence; and through that process saturate the Reader until cross bearing behind Jesus will become more and more a joyful reality. May an arduous study of these Scriptures on cross bearing cause you to “lie asoak in divine truth til it colors you through and through.”<sup>2</sup> Amen.

<sup>1</sup> Arthur Walkington Pink, Published source unknown.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Haddon Spurgeon, The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, Sermon number unknown.

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## Volume III, Chapter 2

## AUTHENTIC LETHAL DISCIPLESHIP

AN EXPOSITORY STUDY OF *Mark 8:27-38*

<sup>27</sup> *And Jesus went out, and his disciples, into the towns of Caesarea Philippi: and by the way he asked his disciples, saying unto them, Whom do men say that I am?*

<sup>28</sup> *And they answered, John the Baptist: but some say, Elias; and others, One of the prophets.*

<sup>29</sup> *And he saith unto them, but whom say ye that I am? And Peter answereth and saith unto him, Thou art the Christ.*

<sup>30</sup> *And he charged them that they should tell no man of him.*

<sup>31</sup> *And he began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.*

<sup>32</sup> *And he spake that saying openly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him.*

<sup>33</sup> *But when he had turned about and looked on his disciples, he rebuked Peter, saying, Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men.*

<sup>34</sup> *And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.*

<sup>35</sup> *For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it.*

<sup>36</sup> *For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?*

<sup>37</sup> *Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*

<sup>38</sup> *Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.*

The cross of Jesus Christ is the central theme of the Bible. The Gospels simply continue that same emphasis, especially since Jesus' entire life's work centered on the cross. Consequently and not surprisingly, the cross is the rudimentary theme and experience of the follower of Jesus. Jesus teaches through this incident and its related instruction that each disciple is to bear his own cross just as Jesus bore His. This cross bearing is an essential part of true discipleship. A personal cross is a part of authentic discipleship just as Jesus' cross was essential to His life and service in behalf of His disciples. According to Jesus, no person can serve God as His disciple without bearing his own inhibiting cross.

The dominant concept of a cross is death, which is a **loss** of life and activity. But in this text, Christ included another cross (which is not really altogether another), a cross He bore throughout His life, which is for all His disciples also to bare, the cross of true discipleship. This idea of a **loss** is primary in the two crosses referred to by Christ. First, there is Christ's original cross. It was His unique and sin-removing torment located in a real historical time and place—a **loss** of physical life on a physical cross. Second, there is the unavoidable abstruse or conceptual cross of discipleship which demands a **loss** of one's life and activities in order to benefit others. It involves stress, difficulty, and a painful ordeal of a life unoccupied with personal considerations, being selfless activity and enterprise of the whole life. Christ's physical cross consisted of cessation of all activity, this other cross is the cessation of all selfish activity. Therefore, this cross bearing, this death to self, is in reality a **loss** of self-interest. Applying this explanation to discipleship, the concept of a "death to self" denotes "a **loss** of self-interest. Applying this explanation to discipleship, the concept of a "death to self" denotes "a loss of self-interest."

Throughout His life on earth, Jesus bore this kind of cross which every disciple is called to accept. Jesus' physical cross is not fully shared by any disciple; it was a penalty which no mere

man could know. Even the physical deaths which some disciples have experienced when following Him were not of the same extremity as Jesus' cross. Therefore, disciples today are called on to take up willingly the kind of cross which can be shared with Jesus. This cross consists of a selfless activity for Jesus which consumes one's entire life. It is a cross bearing; it is a death to self; it is the same **loss** of self-interest which characterized Jesus' life.

It could be put this way: Jesus' physical cross was a physical death to all self-interest, but His cross bearing was a continuous life void of self-interest. The latter leads to and interprets the former. Jesus always "lived" only to die. That is, His every occupation was engaged in one ultimate goal: to fulfill His Father's will in Jerusalem on the cross. Everything led up to that one event, and nothing could successfully hinder that purpose in His life. This continuous cross bearing by Jesus is revealed in the words:

*Now is my soul troubled [concerning His approaching death]; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour [of death]: but for this cause [of death] came I unto this hour [of death].*  
*John 12:27*

Jesus' literal cross and His intuitive cross were equally necessary for the salvation of any person. Christ's death at Calvary paid the price for the salvation of all believers only because He had already died to all self-interest. He had already taken up an intuitive cross at the very beginning of His life on earth. He could never have been of service to His people until and unless He first died to self-interest; otherwise He would never have submitted to the physical cross. Likewise, a death to self-interest must be the mind-set of the disciple if any benefit is to be derived from his or her discipleship.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> This is also the fundamental message of *The Epistle of James*, as summed up in the rather notorious words of 2:19-20, *Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?* These words are the accrument and aggregate of true discipleship versus false discipleship.

That kind of abandonment of self-interests with a corresponding adherence to Christ is of what true spirit-motivated faith consists, which is the only kind that saves. Only the type of faith which abandons self-interests produces true discipleship and salvation. There must be an appreciable **loss of self-interest**. This rather hard truth is the essence of this lesson on discipleship from Jesus.

This study into Jesus' doctrine of discipleship articulates the ever-continuing controversy of Lordship salvation versus Savior-only profession. That is a primary reality involved in cross bearing.

### Analysis of the Text

Two deaths are cited in this text: First, the death of Christ in *verses 31-33*, which includes and involves His death to self. And second, the death of the disciple in *verses 34-38*, which parallels Jesus' death to self-interest. In His teaching on the disciple's death to self-interest (cross bearing), Jesus covers the entire breadth of the disciple's life here on earth. First, He relates cross-bearing to beginning the Christian life in *verse 34*, *Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me*. Second, He relates cross bearing to living the Christian life in *verse 35*, *For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it*. Third, he relates cross bearing to finishing the Christian life in *verses 36-38*, *For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels*. Involved in each of these three areas is also the other two. That is, beginning discipleship is not all to which the truth of *verse 34* applies. And so it is with the other truths throughout this text. Certain principles are applicable to every other period of true discipleship. Whether the

beginning, the continuous living, or finishing the Christian life, these truths related to cross bearing will have purpose. Therefore, all these verses and their relevant truths apply to all the discipleship experience, beginning to end.

Also, in considering this text, Mark's narrative has a very natural flow to it, as follows: First, there is the description of Christ's own death to self-interest in His cross, *verses 27-33*. Second, there is the description of that cross bearing death to self-interest which was Christ's, and is to be every disciples' also, *verse 34*. Third, and related closely to that death to self-interest, there are Christ's reasons for this cross bearing as related in *verses 35-38*. Following this analysis, this exposition will consider three areas:

First, we shall take notice of the occasion of Christ's teaching concerning this death to self in *verses 27-33*, and observe: The **Pattern** set for true discipleship.

Second, in *verse 34* and in the light of His own cross, we will view: Christ's own **Portrait** of our required death to self.

Third, in *verses 35-38*, we will consider: Christ's **Persuasion** for this compulsory death to self in His authentic disciples.

## I. CHRIST'S DEATH TO SELF-INTEREST IS THE PATTERN FOR TRUE DISCIPLESHIP

The life of Christ could be divided into two principal phases. The first would be the period of His active public ministry of about three years when He firmly established Himself as the Jewish Messiah through the works (miracles) of God that He performed. The second period of His ministry lasted only about the last six months of His physical life. The dividing point of these two phases was the great confession of Peter in the opening incident in this text.

### The Great Confession

*And Jesus went out, and his disciples, into the towns of Caesarea Philippi: and by the way he asked his disciples, saying unto them, Whom do men say that I am?*

*And they answered, John the Baptist: but some say, Elias; and others, One of the prophets.*

*And he saith unto them, but whom say ye that I am? And Peter answereth and saith unto him, Thou art the Christ.*

*And he charged them that they should tell no man of him.*

*Mark 8:27-30*

All that Jesus did up to that confession was meant mainly to convince His inner-disciples that He was indeed the Christ. That assurance was the required foundation for His disciples in view of the nearing awfulness of the cross. Only then, during His last six months, did Jesus teach His disciples plainly and openly of His approaching death in Jerusalem.<sup>4</sup> He repeated this teaching over and over, *But they understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask Him (Mk. 9:32)*. Jesus drew out of His disciples their faith in Him as the Messiah with the question, *But whom say ye that I am?* In taking them aside from the people, He meant their opinion to be heart-felt and uniquely their own. Peter's bold and plain confession left no doubt of their absolute certainty that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah, the true Christ.

<sup>4</sup> See *Mark 8:31-33; 9:30-32; 10:32-34*.

### The Cross before the Crown

*And he began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.*

*And he spake that saying openly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him.*

*But when he had turned about and looked on his disciples, he rebuked Peter, saying, Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men.*

*Mark 8:31-33*

The disciples were blinded to the truth of a cross in the Christ's future, and could see only a crown for their great Messiah, Jesus. Peter, being the spokesman for the twelve, *took him and began to rebuke him*. Jesus surprised Peter and the twelve with this talk of a coming humiliating death as a common criminal. But the Messiah must go by the way of suffering and death to His crowning. The Greek verb used in the words, *He began to teach them*, is in the imperfect tense, which means that our Lord repeatedly detailed His ignominious cross in order to accustom them to the startling reality of His imminent death. Even though such Old Testament prophets as Moses, David, Isaiah,<sup>5</sup> and many others had predicted it, still the disciples knew it not nor saw it not. Jesus *spoke that saying openly*, but they could not receive it. To Peter a cross meant shame and disgust. They looked only for a King with a crown, not for a Savior with a cross.

*Peter took him, and began to rebuke him*. How strange that does seem to us, but are we not sometimes guilty of this? The Greek word for *rebuke* has a connotation of "showing honor to," in other words, "to correct by giving the proper honor to the correct person." The idea in Peter's *rebuke*, therefore, was Peter's laying a higher value on Christ's earthly survival than Jesus did. The word seems to hint that Peter told Jesus that He was worth too much for a

<sup>5</sup> Respectively, *Genesis 3:15, Psalms 22, Isaiah 53*,

death by crucifixion. Are we, as Peter, guilty of placing too much value upon physical life? Certainly, no one could place too much worth upon Christ, but in view of His Father's work for Him to accomplish, His continued earthly existence was secondary. As His disciples, it ought also to be just so with us. Our lives are extremely less valuable than Jesus' life, yet He gave His up for the gospel's sake—we are to do the same!

Peter, then, was attempting to honor Christ, to hold Christ up, to raise Christ's own conception of His own life's value. But Peter had yet to learn that the gospel requires our giving up our most valued possession—ourselves. But as Peter, we often fail to see the proper values clearly. Our crown also must come by way of a cross.

*And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.*

*Romans 8:17*

*...through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God.*

*Acts 14:22*

This physical life with its pleasures, pursuits, and prides is not worthy to be compared with the glory of that future crown. As Christ did, we are to lay down our lives and the pleasures, pursuits, and prides of this world in favor of a cross now. We are to die daily to ourselves and to our desires for earthly joy, and seek to bear a cross that will further the gospel as did Jesus.

### The Offence of Satan

So important was this cross that Peter's denial of its necessity and reality for the Messiah made him an agent of Satan, the arch enemy of God and man. Jesus addressed Peter, *Get thee behind me, Satan; for thou savorest not the things of God, but the things that be of men.* The Greek word for *rebuke* used of Jesus is the same as that used of Peter. This is significant! The Greek word for *rebuke* has a connotation of "showing honor to"; in other words, "to correct by giving the proper honor to the correct person." Peter thought he was

honoring His Lord by laying a higher value on Christ's earthly survival, but Jesus was placing the real value of earthly life where it ought to be—on the cross. He laid a high priority on His death, burial, and resurrection. Peter's weak comprehension of the gospel was *rebuked*, that is, Jesus put a higher honor upon His sanctified earthly life than did Peter, even though Peter thought that he was placing the highest value on Jesus' life. The sanctity of His earthly life required it to be given up, which led Him to criticize and censure Peter's earthly appraisal of His life.

Peter's concept was *not of God*, but was *of men*. It came from man's foolish wisdom of earthly crowns, and was foreign to God's wisdom in the cross. The life now, the existence now, is *of men*, and is most valuably prized by men. Peter was Satan's agent in suggesting that Jesus deviate from the cross and attempt to gain the crown some other way.<sup>6</sup> Satan, as ever he does to this present day, used the ignorance of a well-meaning disciple to further his work of opposing the work of God in the gospel. Today, men are selling out the true worth of their lives for an earthly crown. But, as He did on this occasion, Jesus will have the last word at His judgement when He forever clarifies the relative distinction between the earthly self-life and the heavenly-sanctified earth-life. The earthly self-life is dead to God; the other heavenly-sanctified earth-life is dead to self.

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<sup>6</sup> See Satan's first recorded attempt in *Mt. 4:8-10*.

## II. CHRIST'S PORTRAIT OF TRUE DISCIPLESHIP REQUIRES DEATH TO SELF-INTEREST

The essence of highest duty, the meaning of all truest life, is found in the law of self-sacrifice.

Farrar

*And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.*

*Mark 8:34*

When Jesus *called the people unto him with his disciples*, and said, *Whosoever*, He revealed the scope of this required death to self. The picture He thus exhibited reveals its necessity for everyone without exception. This cross bearing is for all men who would come to Christ for a share in His crown. Death to self is the way to Christ, as well as the way of Christ. Christ does not change the required way of living true discipleship from the required way of entrance into true discipleship,

*Enter ye in by the narrow gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many are they that enter in thereby.*

*For narrow is the gate, and straitened the way, that leadeth unto life, and few are they that find it.*

*Matthew 7:13-14 ASV*

### Willingness to Die

The death of self, this true discipleship, is for *whosoever will*, which shows that it requires consent. Cross bearing is not something that is put upon anyone involuntarily. It is not the loss of a limb through an accident, or a disease one might contract, or the difficulty of some other uncontrollable circumstance, but it is an intentional death to one's self-interest in this life, after once and for all being brought to see sin's hopelessness and one's utter lostness without the cross

of Christ. This work of grace by the Holy Spirit causes the sinner to be willing and compliant to Christ's proposed death to self for His every disciple. It is a self-decision, this self-death, a suicide of sorts. Jesus is saying in effect, "If anyone will become agreeable with this death to self by an act of his will to come after Me, then he will indeed deny himself, take up his cross, and follow in My steps." It is all a matter of one's personal choice, a choice made possible through a work of grace already in the heart.

*I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.* [Added emph.] *Galatians 2:20*

*For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works....* [Added emph.] *Ephesians 2:10*

*But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name;*

*Which were born,...of God.* [Added emph.]

*John 1:12-13*

### Positioned to Die

When Jesus said, *Whosoever will come after me*, He stressed the importance of position concerning this death to self. The place of every disciple is behind Jesus. As He bore His cross, so the disciple is to bare his cross. The path to the Crown for the King is only as He willingly became the Savior for sinners. Similarly, our position is behind Him on that path to our crown with our King. Through true discipleship, which will include a death to self, we become a savior to others through our support of His gospel.<sup>7</sup> A disciple's death to self will effect the salvation of other lost men. As we follow Him as true disciples, we will learn the burden of the cross, which is self-sacrifice and death to self-interests for the benefit of others.

<sup>7</sup> Paul used this terminology in *I Cor. 9:22*, ...that I might by all means save some.

*That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death.*  
*Philippians 3:10*

Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. In this expression of true discipleship, Jesus emphasized three absolutes for all men if any are to succeed in their quest for a crown of future and heavenly glory. Those three absolutes are: first, a required self-denial; second, a required self-degradation; and third, a required self-destruction.<sup>8</sup>

**True Discipleship Requires Self-denial**  
*let him deny himself.*

The Greek word used by Jesus means “to renounce, disregard, refuse, reject.” He means that a self-renouncing is required for real discipleship. But the best commentary on His idea is found in the context rather than in lexicons. Jesus had just been speaking of His own act of self-denial in the cross. Consequently, the meaning of our cross is known by considering His self-denial; His self-denial will interpret and define ours.

Jesus was of high birth and of high value in His Person. There is no doubt of His royalty or of the prominence of His pedigree. And as Peter had insisted, “You are too valuable to die. You are worth too much alive.” But Jesus denied the privileges of His high position as God, denied His nobility and royalty of stature, and gave up Himself.<sup>9</sup> He said “No!” to the desires of the flesh and of the world. True disciples deny the wealth of their noble birth as children of the Creator of all, in order to further His gospel. We live not for the fading crown of

<sup>8</sup> In all three, the self-denial, the self-degradation, and the self-destruction, Christ used the imperative mood. “The imperative is the mood of command or entreaty—the mood of volition...an appeal of will to will.” H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1966), p. 174.

<sup>9</sup> Philippians 2:6-8

this earthly scene, but we live for the eternal crown of heaven and the spiritual. We live for the souls of men. Though we are heirs of God, we voluntarily set all claims to it aside. As far as this world's pleasures, prides, and pursuits are concerned, we disown them, we refuse them, disregard them, as He did. *If we suffer, we shall also reign with him.*<sup>10</sup> Joint heirship with Christ means for us in this life "the debt now and the dollar later," so to speak; the liability now and the life eternal later; the cross now with Him and the crown later with Him. For now it is His cross that discipleship requires, while the honors of the crown are laid aside. As He laid aside His rightful place and the glories due Him in favor of a cross of self-denial, so must we also deny self and fulfill the truest meaning of discipleship.

**True Discipleship Requires Self-degradation,**  
*let him...take up his cross*

Cross-bearing was a picture often seen in the Roman Empire and in Jerusalem. It was the common practice of that day to require condemned criminals to carry the very instrument of their approaching death to their place of crucifixion. To carry a cross was to be branded as an outcast, as guilty of crimes against man and God. It was a degradation to carry a cross. Jesus has reference to that then familiar practice. This is closely connected with the self-denial just referred to; in fact, that self-denial will lead to this mark of lowliness and rejection. But it is a part of a voluntary consent to a cross.

**The Cross of Debasing.** The cross of Christ was basically an act of self-debasement. It was an outgrowth of His refusal to cling to His original glories. By even coming to earth, and especially in the crucifixion, He freely chose to lay aside His Kingly Robes, His Royal Rights, His Universal and Eternal Dominion as Lord. Therefore, He was designated as a thief, as a criminal, as an outcast guilty violator against God and man. His cross announced to all the world that here

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<sup>10</sup> *I Timothy 2:12*

was a corrupt man, guilty of crimes deserving death. Every disciple's cross is to be interpreted and defined by His. To bear a cross for Jesus' sake will be similarly degrading in the eyes of the world.

**The Cross of Discipleship.** To bear the cross of discipleship is to be identified with what the world considers dumb and lowly. It is to wear an emblem of failure, as not really having "made it" in the world, as censurable for not being considerate of the more important things of life's pursuit, pleasures, and prides. For the disciple, genuine discipleship associates with the accused, condemned, and outcast Christian life of biblical truth and prudish Christian morals. It is a daily, willing disregard for worldly motivation. It means following in the steps of the Savior in daily activities which will invariably mark one as associated with Jesus Christ and His degrading cross.

**True Discipleship Requires Self-destruction**  
*let him...follow me*

When Jesus carried His cross, He was expending precious energies that would contribute to His own death. He was carrying on self-destructive labors. Essentially, to carry a cross as Jesus' disciple is to carry on activities in one's life which will in themselves lead to more and more crucifixion. This means continuously to take steps throughout this life that will bring one to a deeper loss of self-interest. With every step toward Calvary, Jesus was exerting His own energies to help bring about His own death. The Christian disciple similarly is to make decisions and make commitments that will add to more and more self-denial and to intensified self-crucifixion. Like steps toward our Calvary, with our crosses borne on agonizing shoulders, we are led behind Jesus to certain death to self with every step. Each step brings deeper surrender to God's final and ultimate will for our lives. That ultimate goal is a complete and final crucifixion of the flesh, and a spiritual life of victory in His resurrection power.

As the condemned Jesus traveled to His own death willingly so also are His disciples. His disciples are to take steps in this life that will put them closer to that ultimate death to self. Throughout His life, Jesus did and said things that increased the opposition to Himself. But true to His own self-denial, Jesus continued each step, each act, each word, each day so as to bring about His own crucifixion. He contributed to His own death. To follow Jesus is to do likewise.

True discipleship requires continuing always to do the Father's will even though each word spoken for Him, each deed done for Him, and each pursuit for Him brings about increased self-destruction of the flesh. To follow Jesus in this self-destruct mode is to make decisions that will lead to more and greater self-denial. It is to commit oneself to more yieldedness, and then to fulfill those commitments with unreserved acts which will inevitably lead to even more commitments. It is to take on more responsibilities in work for His gospel which will in turn lead to intensified work for His gospel. This cross-bearing is to cooperate in the destruction of one's flesh so that one experiences inescapable discipleship in the Spirit.

### III. CHRIST'S PERSUASION OF A COMPULSORY DEATH TO SELF-INTEREST IN HIS DISCIPLES

Christ now gives His persuasion concerning this death to self in *Mark 8:35-38*. He details in rather precise terms His strong beliefs and convictions—His system of true discipleship. In other words, Jesus shows what brought about such rigid requirement for becoming a genuine learner of Jesus. What is the rationale behind such a selfless life? The answer to that question is, Disciples must experience and live this selfless life:

First, because its results are **Eternal**, *verse 35*.

Second, because of an otherwise poor **Exchange**, *verses 36-37*.

Third, because of the otherwise unfavorable **Earnings**, *verse 38*.

#### Christ's Rationale # 1

#### Death to Self is Necessary because its Results are Eternal

*For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it.* *Mark 8:35*

Jesus spoke a rather paradoxical proverb in this verse. The word *life* is used as the life in this world, or as what the world values as the profitable enterprises, but it is valueless when compared to the eternal. Jesus is saying in effect,

*You must take up your cross and follow Me, because whosoever will value his earthly pursuits as secondary for My benefit and for the gospel's benefit will preserve his eternal life in the future kingdom. But whosoever esteems this life's pursuits as worthy of preservation will default his life in the end.*

—Jesus Christ, 35 A.D.

“The one who wishes to save his natural life and worldly well-being at the cost of spiritual things, shall lose his eternal spiritual life. On the contrary, one who gives up a life of worldliness—the lower life of animal happiness—for the sake of Christ and His gospel will himself find and save the higher spiritual life.”<sup>11</sup>

Again, the principle involved in Christ's example of cross-bearing is our pattern as related to the truth in this verse. Christ *lost* His physical life's pursuits, pleasures, and prides in order to *save* them for the gospel. His whole life was one of cross bearing, that is, a continuous death to His fleshly *life*. He *lost* His personal pursuit of earthly happiness, and in so doing, *saved* it for eternal and spiritual purposes. This is to be our life also. As Christ lived for us by bearing His cross throughout His life, so also are we to live for Him by bearing our crosses daily throughout our lives. Our death to self is a constant experience as was His. It is a daily *loss* of our life's pursuits, pleasures, and prides in order to *save* our life for His pursuits and pleasures, and even His pride, the gospel. A life void of cross-bearing and self-denial—death to self—is one that is ruined for Christ; it is *lost* for eternal values, because it does not benefit Christ or the gospel.

**Christ's Rationale # 2**  
**Death to Self is Necessary Because of an Otherwise**  
**Poor Exchange**

*For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?*

*Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*

*Mark 8:36-37*

The likelihood of exchanging one's life for a better possession than Christ and His gospel is poor indeed. Any other exchange of one's life will only be to trade down, to become the loser. For several years I had occasion to trade or barter with a neighbor who made a living largely from the trade and barter business. I

<sup>11</sup> J. W. Shepherd, The Christ of the Gospels (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968), p. 310-11.

would deal with him on this and then on that, but I always came out the loser. Finally, I learned that he was too sharp for me, and that he would never trade, barter, or deal in anything unless he had an absolute and clear advantage. I could never even come out even, but would be worse off if I exchanged with or bought anything from him. According to Jesus, that is the posture of all men concerning this physical existence that we manage down here. The greatest use of one's life is to lose it for Christ's sake; that really is the saving of it. There just is no other exchange for one's life that will bring as good a rate of exchange as will its being "spent" for Christ and the gospel. There is no other way to show a profit from life, except by losing it to Jesus. Any bartering with this life down here will only result in great loss unless exchanged for Christ and His gospel's sake .

In the wilderness temptations Satan attempted a barter with the Lord Jesus.<sup>12</sup> He offered the world's glory in exchange for Jesus' obedience to Satan's plan. Jesus could have traded His cross for a worldly crown. However, it would have been a trade down for Jesus to have given His life for Satan's use, because the cross advances eternal and spiritual glory for Christ and for the ones whom the cross profited. To have by-passed the cross would have left Jesus alone with the temporal, temporary, and fleeting carnalities of the world, and with nothing lasting. Satan offered to Him far less than what His life was worth in God's eternal market arena and in The Spiritual Exchange Bank of Eternity--the Cross of Calvary. But Jesus refused Satan's exchange, and instead substituted His earthly life for the eternal happiness of His disciples, and for His Father's eternal glory in the gospel.

The same principle applies to men. If one seeks to save this earthly life for one's own pursuits, that swap with Satan will destroy and ruin the spiritual lives of others, just as Jesus would have, had He by-passed the cross in favor of Satan's mundane offers. One cannot exchange what is one's most valuable asset

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<sup>12</sup> *Matthew 4:1-11*

and what is of more inestimably worth than it is possible at all to otherwise obtain, and then profit from any earthy transaction. There is no profitable trade with one's everlasting soul, unless that barter is with Jesus. Amen!

One can live the most profitable earthly life, and gain every temporal pursuit possible, realize every pleasure imaginable, and gain every prideful acclaim from all men everywhere; nevertheless that life has been traded down for lesser valued wood, hay, and stubble—all very perishable items.<sup>13</sup> The silver, gold, and precious stone of the Eternal Kingdom are obtained only through a spiritual barter of one's life with Jesus. The eternal is never traded up for anything, but is always exchanged down for the perishing and ruined treasures that rust, become moth-eaten, and are stolen by disguised demonic thieves who violate the inviolability and pledge of every carnal barter.<sup>14</sup>

*What shall it profit?* is a proper question for those with a mind-set of worldly pursuits. Peter had valued Jesus' physical life as being beyond the eternal spiritual market when he rebuked Jesus. But Jesus says to all who have similar disposition,

*There is no profit to be realized in bartering one's soul away for perishing values. If a person should gain the whole world (every worldly pursuit, pleasure, and pride) and the soul should be lost in hell, what gain is that? That is a trade down! Unless I die, unless I forfeit My life, take up My cross, and die the degrading death of the criminal, I can bring no profit to you. And unless you do likewise for Me and for the gospel, you will not profit yourself or Me; because you are actually imposing a greater penalty upon yourself than what you thought to avoid. Your own life's happiness and welfare will in the end be lost.*

—Jesus Christ, 35 A.D.

<sup>13</sup> *I Corinthians 3:12-15. Ecclesiastes 1:2-3, 14; 12:13-14.*

<sup>14</sup> *Matthew 6:19-21*

Christ's Rationale #3  
Death to Self is Necessary Because of the  
Otherwise Unfavorable Earnings

*Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.*  
Mark 8:38

This verse deals more with negative damages than with the positive earnings or profit from cross-bearing. Jesus deals mainly with a failure to die to self, while the profit from a death to self is implied from what is not said. The implication is that Jesus will not be ashamed of anyone in the presence of His Father's glory if cross-bearing had become a part of one's discipleship in this life. However, the negative is the Lord's emphasis, and He warns that failure to bear a cross in this life will mean failure to share in His crown in the next. Discipleship must include bearing a cross, must involve dying to self-interests, must improve the gospel in this life, if it is to have any personal self-profit for eternity. In other words, if a disciple aspires to profit from Christ's work in the next life, he must have borne a cross in the present one.

**A Crossless Sowing Brings a Crownless Reaping**

There is a "law of the harvest" throughout the Bible. This law states that when one sows a certain seed, then one will reap that same certain thing. Jesus used that law in this verse, but with a unique slant. He says this: "A crossless sowing will result in a crownless reaping." Or one might put it this way: "A life free from the shame of the cross now, will result in a reward free from the glory of the cross' attainment later." The first part of the verse refers to the sowing and the latter to the reaping. If one sows real shame on the cross by refusing to be identified with its supposed shame of bearing its burdens throughout this life, then Christ will bring a harvest of real shame upon that one when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels. This tangible shame is earned for them through the cross. They did not "sow" His cross because they felt embarrassment from, and

believed there was an assumed shame in, His cross in this life. They refused to sustain its meaning and effectual work in their lives; therefore they will “reap” great shame in eternity because they owned no share in His cross, which alone confers a share in His crown.

To be ashamed of Christ and of His words is to refuse to find identity with Him in the cross. Peter had been ashamed of the words of Jesus concerning His cross in *verse 32*. To that kind of feeling of contempt and disillusionment toward the imagined shame of the cross, Jesus has His own kind of contempt and disillusionment. Jesus rebuked Peter and will more than rebuke those who continue in such shameful conduct. Peter was corrected because he was a true disciple and therefore correctable.

To be ashamed of Christ is to refuse to suffer the reproach of being known as a Christian, who lives not for this life’s pursuits, pleasures, and prides, but lives a life of self-denial in order to benefit the gospel. “Crossless sowing” is living as if the cross were unworthy of one’s most valued time, efforts, scrutiny, and wealth. Failure to surrender to the lowly and surrendered life of Jesus now, eliminates one from the lofty glory of the crown later.

The Greek word translated *ashamed* is akin to the English word, “tarnished,” with the meaning of “to make ugly, mar.” A disciple who would never take up a cross of self-denial, who would never lay aside the supposed beauties of this life, who would consider their lives tarnished, dishonored, and uglier if lived for Christ and the gospel, is one in whom He would similarly be dishonored, tarnished, and uglier in the day of His glory, if they were permitted a share. For those who feel tarnished by the demeanor of a self-less life as His cross requires, He refuses to share His crown, because they would tarnish His glory in His Kingdom. They were averted from the change which would have qualified them to become Christ-like.<sup>15</sup> Accordingly, the cross and the crown are inseparably linked in a sowing/reaping relation. Unless one suffers the

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<sup>15</sup> *John 3:5; II Corinthians 5:17.*

ugliness of the cross now in self-denial, there can be no glory shared through the beauties of His crowning in the Kingdom of His Father. There could be no joy in His presence there, because the absence of a cross in this life would bring disgrace and ugliness to His Kingdom then. Only the Christ-like shall inherit the Kingdom,<sup>16</sup> and they are only made thus by cross bearing. It is eternally so! Amen.

### The Tarnished Cross

The tarnishing effect of the cross in this world is real. His cross and the gospel does tarnish the brilliance of this worldly life. This principle is perceived in Christ's cross. A cross does not measure up to the glitter of this adulterous and sinful generation. Christ's Person and His work with the cross are unpopular. There is a *shame* connected with someone refusing this world's standards of pursuit, pleasure, and pride in favor of the gospel. Jesus says,

*If you consider yourself tarnished by Myself and by My gospel of shame which is intended for the changing of your life, then I would become discolored and dulled by your presence with Me in My Kingdom with My untarnished angels. If My presence and My gospel, as realized and symbolized in My cross, would mar your life if you made Me and My cross a part of it, then I will accelerate your own ugliness and mar you when I come again to establish My Kingdom.*<sup>17</sup> —Jesus Christ, 35A.D.

### The Untarnished Crown

The untarnished crown comes only through the tarnished cross. If He had refused the cross—was ashamed of it—then all those who would have been in the Kingdom through that cross would tarnish the crown, because they would yet be in sin

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<sup>16</sup> *Romans 8:20*

<sup>17</sup> This great truth is one point of, and considered by some the theme of, The Parable of the Marriage Feast, *Mt.22: 1-14*

and in its subsequent defiling ugliness. Their sin and guilt would not at all adorn or otherwise complement the glories of His Kingdom. But the cross removed their sin and its guilt. The fact of the cross, for those who really understand and thus profit from it, is the very embodiment of real beauty and delight. That death is their life, and their death to self is Christ's life in them. Paul said as much when he expressed it as,

*I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.*  
*Galatians 2:20*

Therefore, the ashamedness connected with the cross is also the unashamedness of the crown. They together are a part of every believer's life. The cross now, the crown later; but the cross will forever be our crown. Because for us who know the beauty of the cross, its tarnish is its loveliness; and it shall even be our glorious crown throughout eternity.

*But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.*  
*Galatians 6:14*

### No Death Of Self Means No Death For Self

Jesus' teaching on this cross-bearing began and ended on the shame caused by the cross. No sooner had the disciples confessed Jesus as the Messiah than He told them that He must die on a cross, a common criminal's ignominious death. That humiliating revelation caused Peter to object, and to vehemently deny that it should ever happen to Jesus. He was ashamed to think that such a thing should befall the Christ—the King of all the earth. Then, after describing His disciples' similarly required death to self, Jesus referred back to this subject of shame in *verse 38*.

*Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.*

*Mark 8:38*

Jesus said that those who are ashamed of His cross, as Peter had expressed shame, would have no share in the glories of His Kingdom. This means that Jesus' death does not count for those who can live a life void of voluntary cross bearing. If one never dies to self, he knows nothing of real discipleship, and will never find Christ's death to be profitable in the next life. Discipleship consists of following Jesus, being His learner, follower, and mimic. If there is no cross bearing, or loss of self now, the death of Christ has not secured eternal life for the future then, because Christ was never really followed. In other words: if there is no death of oneself, there will be no death of Christ for the benefit of oneself. If the death of Christ has not brought about cross bearing in this life, then the death of Christ will not bring about any good eternal consequence in the next. Again, if Jesus' cross has not produced a personal cross now, then Jesus' cross will not produce a personal crown latter.

### **Sharing in the Cross of Christ**

The kind of surrender involved in salvation is a Christ-like surrender that thoroughly identifies with the humiliation of a life void of this world's pursuits, pleasures, and prides, just as Jesus exhibited in His life. No other experience except a loss of self-interest procures His death to achieve discipleship. According to Jesus, cross bearing, in one form or another, to one degree or another, is essential to true discipleship. Amen.

Throughout this exposition salvation has been equated with a death to self, or a loss of self-interest. This is plainly put by Jesus in the text, and elsewhere. However, this "loss of self-interest" or death to self is experienced in varying degrees by true disciples. Just as each convert's personal cross deviates from the particular burden of every other disciple, so each

convert's experience and advancement in losing their "self-interest" varies in levels, both in intensity and thoroughness. However, in one's initial experience with Jesus, this "loss of self-interest" is absolute and necessary to salvation. Then, as one is cultivated by the Lord into maturity, that initial death to self grows in both intensity and thoroughness until *the day of Jesus Christ*.<sup>18</sup>

Paul referred to a *fellowship in the gospel*,<sup>19</sup> which surely includes this experience of cross bearing, and he acknowledged an actual sharing in the death of Christ. For Paul, Christ's sufferings were incomplete in himself until he finished his life of cross bearing, as related in the words,

*I am now glad amid my sufferings for you, and am making up in my own physique on behalf of His body, which is the church, what I am still lacking of Christ's afflictions*<sup>20</sup>  
Colossians 1:24

A full experiential knowledge and realization of Christ's sufferings is never really attainable by any of His disciples; however, as Paul, true disciples know and endure His sufferings in a sort of supplemental kind of way by obeying their Lord's words: ***Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.*** Through these inescapably harsh experiences of bearing a cross in this life, all disciples can *know him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death*.<sup>21</sup> Real acquaintance, familiarity, and intimacy with Jesus comes in no other way. There are no shortcuts. In the end, only through such comparable cross bearing as His, will disciples unreservedly and unconditionally *be conformed to the image of his Son, and so be like him... and see him as he is*.<sup>22</sup>

Amen

<sup>18</sup> Phil. 1:6 <sup>19</sup> Phil. 1:5

<sup>20</sup> Gerrit Verkuyl, The Berkeley Version (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1945), p. 216

<sup>21</sup> Phil. 3:10

<sup>22</sup> Romans 8:29; 1 John 3:2