

Theological Equipping Class

The Disciplines of Self-Denial and Simplicity

April 17, 2022

What is Discipleship?

- The Great Commission
 - *And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”* (Matthew 28:18–20)
- Imitation
- Mortification and vivification

Self-Denial

Christ is the Exemplar of Self-Denial

- *And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.”* (Matthew 26:39)
- *Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.* (Philippians 2:3–8)
- What did Christ give up/empty Himself of?

The Call to Self-Denial

- *Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.*

For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? (Matthew 16:24–26)

- What's the problem?
- *Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. (James 1:13–15)*
 - "When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die." (Boenhoeffer)

So What Should You Deny Yourself?

- Sin
 - *Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. (Colossians 3:5–10)*
 - *For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. (Romans 8:13)*
 - *And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. (Galatians 5:24)*
- The Expulsive Power of a New Affection (Thomas Chalmers)
- *If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. (Colossians 3:1–2)*
 - Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink, sex, and ambition, when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased. (CS Lewis)
- Adiaphora, morally neutral things
- "I have now concentrated all my prayers into one, and that one prayer is this, that I may die to self, and live wholly to Him." (Spurgeon)

Is this Asceticism?

- *If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh. (Colossians 2:20–23)*
- So what is asceticism? self-denial taken out of context and to an unhealthy extreme.
- *Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving... (1 Timothy 4:1–4)*
- Two dangers to avoid. – refraining never and always
- *Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:11–13)*

Simplicity

The Simplicity of God

- Now Christian theology has always been more or less conscious of this calling. On the whole, its teaching has been that God is “simple,” that is, sublimely free from all composition, and that therefore one cannot make any real [i.e., ontological] distinction between his being and his attributes. Each attribute is identical with God’s being: he is what he possesses. In speaking of creatures we make all sorts of distinctions between what they are and what they have. A person, for example, is still human even though he or she has lost the image of God and has become a sinner. But in God all his attributes are identical with his being. God is light through and through; he is all mind, all wisdom, all logos, all spirit, and so forth. In God “to be is the same as to be wise, which is the same as to be good, which is the same as to be powerful. One and the same thing is stated whether it be said that God is eternal or immortal or good or just.” Whatever God is, he is that completely and simultaneously. “God has no properties but is pure essence. God’s properties are really the same as his essence: they neither differ from his essence nor do they differ materially from each other.” (Herman Bavinck)

The Discipline of Simplicity and the Distracted Life

- The distraction and restlessness of the age
- Cleaning the outside of the cup?

- "Simplicity is an inward reality that results in an outward lifestyle. Both are necessary." (Richard Foster)

Simplicity of Possessions

- *Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."* (Hebrews 13:5)
- *But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.* (1 Timothy 6:6–10)
- *Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.* (Matthew 6:19–21)
- *No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.* (Matthew 6:24)
- "Contemporary culture is plagued by a passion to possess. The unreasoned boast abounds that the good life is found in accumulation, that 'more is better.' Indeed, we often accept this notion without question, with the result that the lust for affluence in contemporary society has become psychotic." (Richard Foster)
- "The stomach is sooner filled than the eye." (Thomas Watson)
- *...give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, "Who is the Lord?" or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.* (Proverbs 30:8–9)

Simplicity of Schedule

- *Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time.* (Colossians 4:5)
- *Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.* (Ephesians 5:15–16)

Practical Tips for Pursuing Simplicity

1. Prioritize your life.
2. Live below your means.
3. Establish healthy rhythms of work and rest.
4. Cultivate contentment.
5. Declutter your life.

"The principle runs through all life from top to bottom. Give up yourself, and you will find your real self. Lose your life and you will save it. Submit to death, death of your ambitions and favorite wishes every day and the

death of your whole body in the end: submit with every fiber of your being, and you will find eternal life. Keep back nothing. Nothing that you have not given away will be really yours. Nothing in you that has not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for yourself, and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin, and decay. But look for Christ and you will find him, and with him everything else thrown in." (CS Lewis)

“For you made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.” (Augustine)