

Sermon Outlines
Practicing Self-Denial - Part 1

Reading:

Mark 9:38-50

Balance is one of the key things in the Christian life. A warp in the wheel throws the whole life off-centre and sends many otherwise good and earnest believers in wrong directions.

These disciples swung like a pendulum in an opposite direction from asking who is the greatest in the kingdom to stopping others from doing works in Jesus' name. In v.38, John, that good and godly apostle, was in error for failing to encourage others in the Lord's service. He needed to be corrected.

In these verses, the Lord addressed a number of dangers or pitfalls that the Christian, who would be useful, must avoid.

He called for self-denial in Christian service

It would appear that this is an extension of the previous lessons on becoming as a little child in God's service. Follow along to see the need for self-denial in the Christian life.

1) We need to practice self-denial to overcome small-man syndrome (v.38)

John, of all disciples, fell into the error that only those in the immediate band of Christ's followers could be useful in God's kingdom. The Lord's rebuke to John enlightens us to the reality that God's kingdom-work is bigger than any local congregation.

That is true of denominations and of the power of the Lord at work in His church around the world. We must not think that unless everyone serves and worships exactly as ourselves they cannot be blessed by God.

This narrow-mindedness has plagued the Lord's church for so many generations and has been a blight on her testimony. We are separatists from apostate preachers and churches and we seek the purity of the gospel, but we do allow that God can use any means to call a people out of the world to build His church.

We must be very careful that we do not hinder, nor discourage those who genuinely serve the Lord as they do so in some other way. We should be thankful for every cog that moves the machinery of the gospel.

To confess that we are but a cog in the wheel of God's church building program is better than to try to stop others from serving Christ in the world.

2) We need to practice Self-denial to gain the Lord's rewards for encouragement (v.41)

Note that the cup of water must be given in the Lord's name and because souls belong to Christ. To serve Christ's people is deemed to serve the Lord Himself. So everything that we do to encourage and promote our brothers and sisters in Christ and their service for the Lord is a good work, that will not go unrewarded.

The self-denial required to encourage our fellow believers is the same servant-spirit the Lord outlined to be a foremost disciple ("If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all" v.35). So we must strive to encourage, we must strengthen the brethren, and we must help the weaker brother to serve Christ. Then you will be doing a good service.

3) We need to practice self-denial to avoid offense (v.42)

We learn from these fearful words spoken by our Lord that God will avenge the hurts of His own people. The Lord may have been alluding to the little bony boy in his arms, but this warning applies to any of His

Sermon Outlines
Practicing Self-Denial - Part 1

redeemed children. It is a most serious thing to "offend" a fellow believer or servant of the Lord. When we understand that to offend may mean to "entrap", or "trip up", we begin to see that it is an evil work.

Jockeying for position, putting others down to promote self, tarnishing someone's character and keeping them from following through in the Lord's service, is contrary to the spirit of Christ and He will judge it severely. It is such an evil that a Christian should never be privy to as it's judgment is reserved for the wicked who suffer in hellfire.

True discipleship is known by Christians who love one another, and in such a manner that the world takes note. The Lord said, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples when ye love one another." The emphasis which the Lord put upon this command compels us to take heed:

- a) Jn. 13:34 A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.
- b) Jn. 13:35 By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.
- c) Jn. 15:12 This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.
- d) Jn. 15:17 These things I command you, that ye love one another.

The person who ignores these things and spends his energy and works with carnal zeal to oppose and discourage a brother or sister shows that he is not moved by the spirit of Christ, nor ready to be His disciple in heart.

. . . . Ian Goligher