

**“The ABC’s of the Christian Life: (25) Following Jesus Christ Rightly:
#17. Three Great Foes: First, the World (part 1)**

Introduction:

The Word of God sets forth the Christian life as a life-long spiritual war in which we struggle to withstand and defeat our enemies, after which we will enjoy the spoils of victory. We encounter battle after battle as we journey toward heaven. Paul could say at the end of his life as he anticipated standing before the Lord, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith” (2 Tim. 4:7). This was the way in which he summarized his life, that of a grand battle.

Because conflict is the nature of the Christian life, we find a great deal of language in the Scriptures that warn us and exhort us to wage a successful spiritual warfare against spiritual enemies. The Apostle John wrote of the Christian’s victory in our battle with the *world*: “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4). The Apostle Peter gave attention to the war we wage against our own *flesh*, or sinful desires, as we seek to live before God. 1 Peter 2:11 reads, “Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.” And then the Apostle Paul wrote that we should be prepared for a spiritual battle against *spiritual forces*. We read in Ephesians 6:11-12, “Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” Paul was speaking of the need to clothe oneself with the whole armor of God, in order to stand against the wiles of the *devil*. These three passages that we just quoted describe the spiritual warfare that we wage takes place in three areas of our lives. We are continuously engaging in battle on three fronts against three enemies that are allied with one another against us. We fight against the world, the flesh, and the devil.

In our series on the ABC’s of the Christian Life, with particular emphasis on following Jesus Christ rightly, or, in a right manner, it is important that we address these three arenas of spiritual conflict of the Christian life. And so today, we will begin to address the danger that the world, or rather, worldliness, poses to the soul and how the Christian is to overcome the world so that he comes forth as the victor. May each of us as we face the end of life be able to say as Paul, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.”

I. The world as an enemy to the people of God

The word, “world”, is commonly used in the Scriptures. The King James Version of our Bible uses the word, “world”, 287 times in 247 verses. The specific meaning of “world” varies from context to context. When we study the Scriptures, we must be careful when we see this term, to consider its many shades of meaning. For example, sometimes “world” is used to identify the entire *universe*. The Greek word translated “world” is *κόσμος (kosmos)*, from which we get the English word, “cosmos.”

Romans 1:20 probably reflects this use of “the world” as meaning the entire physical universe. Paul wrote, “For since the creation of the *world* His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse (Rom. 1:20). In John 1:10 we read of Jesus Christ that “The world was made by Him.” We might assume at a casual reading of this clause that John was here speaking of *the physical planet earth*, but actually John was probably using here the term, world, to refer to the fallen human race, for when we read the following verse in context, we may draw this conclusion. Here is the entire verse: “He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.” We may conclude, therefore, that in this context the “world” should be understood as *the fallen human race*.

In other places, however, the term, “world”, is not a reference to the entire human race, but rather just *a large number of people*. Of the popularity of Jesus we read in John 12:19, “Look, the world has gone after Him!”

A common use of the term, “world”, is a reference to *Gentiles* of the world in contrast and distinction from Jewish people. This idea is found in Romans 11:12 and 15:

Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness! (Rom. 11:12)

For if their (Jews) being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? (Rom. 11:15)

In Matthew 16:26 and in 1 Corinthians 7:31, the “world” is *the sum of worldly possessions*, the things of the world that people may acquire for themselves. Jesus said, “For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole *world*, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matt. 16:26). And Paul wrote,

This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none,³⁰ and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods,³¹ and those who deal with the *world* as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away. (1 Cor. 7:29 ESV)

But aside from these various uses of the term, world, when we are speaking of the world as *a spiritual enemy* that we must defeat in our lives, we use the term as it depicts *the culture of this fallen world including its ideas, values, and practices that are in opposition to the will of God*. This is the use of the word that we are addressing. It is depicted in **1 John 2:15-17**, in which we read,

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶For all that is in the world-- the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life-- is not of the Father but is of the world. ¹⁷And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

Let us consider some other verses that use the term “world” in this manner: Our Lord Jesus told His disciples, “The *world* cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil” (John 7:7). Jesus said to the corrupt Jewish leaders, “You are from beneath; I am from above. You are of this *world*; I am not of this *world*” (John 8:23). He spoke to His disciples of the devil and as the ruler of this fallen world. “I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this *world* is coming, and he has nothing in Me” (John 14:30). Later Paul wrote of the fallen world system: “Now we have received, not the spirit of the *world*, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God” (1 Cor. 2:12). And later he would describe himself in his former life among unbelieving Jews, “Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the *world*” (Gal. 4:3). He warned the Christians in Colossae, “Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the *world*, and not according to Christ” (Col. 2:8). And then James wrote, “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the *world*. (James 1:27). It is this fallen world, from which we have been redeemed, that we must fight against and overcome through our faith in the Lord Jesus.

II. Our vulnerability to the influence of the world and the means to overcome it.

Let us make a few statements about the “world” and how we struggle against it and how we are to deal with it. First, the Holy Scriptures declare that the world is opposed to God and should be opposed by Christians. We read in James 4:4, “Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” We see, then, that as Christians we are to resist and defeat the world and its influences upon us. The world is perishing, and we are to see to it that we do not perish with the world. 1 John 2:17 reads, “The world passes away, and the lust thereof: but he that does the will of God abides forever.”

Second, because we are creatures of the world, even after we become Christians, the world is a cause of difficulty for us. The world is an expression of the ideas, values, and practices that reside in our own fallen nature. Consequently, and this is important, there is an infinity that we have toward the world. The world’s ways seem naturally to be right and reasonable to us, even though they are in complete opposition to God and His will. Because of this (1) we do not easily recognize worldliness that resides in our own thinking. The world imposes upon us daily its ways of thinking, its values, and its ways of behaving. And sadly, to our own detriment, we readily embrace them. And (2) we do not readily embrace God’s Word when it confronts our worldliness. We are prone to resist and resent the ways of His Word. This is because His ways do not immediately make sense to us, for His ways do not appeal to unspiritual minds. What, then, are we to do?

Third, God has promised that true Christians will be victorious over the world. John wrote, “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world-- our faith” (1 John 5:4). This faith is in the Lord to enable us to recognize the errors, even the subtleties of error that the world poses to us, and to trust Him to enable us to order our thinking and conform our lives to the Word of God to counter and defeat the world. This is set forth in Paul’s words in Romans 12:1ff, which read,

I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. ²And do not be conformed to this *world*, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Rom. 12:1f)

III. How are we to use the biblical means to correct worldliness

1. We must *humble* ourselves before God and *recognize our ignorance* and the likelihood we do not see things rightly. The Scriptures tell us that we do not immediately recognize the right way in which God would direct our ways and efforts. Because of our sin and the deceitfulness of the devil in presenting worldly ways as appealing and reasonable, generally our first inclinations and impressions are worldly, not spiritual in nature. The wise man, Solomon, said the same thing in two places, apparently for emphasis because it is a common malady among the people of God. We read in Proverbs 14:12, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.” If that were not enough, we read the same thing two chapters later in Proverbs 16:25, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.”

John Gill (1697-1771) wrote on this:

As the way of sin and wickedness does, it promising much carnal pleasure and mirth; there is a great deal of company in it, it is a broad road, and is pleasant, and seems right, but it leads to destruction; so the way of the hypocrite and Pharisee that trusts to his own righteousness, and despises others, and even the righteousness of Christ; or however does not submit to it, but tramples upon him, and counts the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and so is deserving of sorer punishment than the profane sinner; yet on account of his good works, as he calls them, fancies himself to be in a fair way for heaven and happiness...

The fact is that we are easily deceived, for we think that we are right in our reasoning and justified in our actions, that is, before we consult with God in His Word. For many times when we search the Scriptures, we discover that the Lord prescribes an entirely different, even contradictory manner to address a situation.

Matthew Henry (1662-1714) also addressed Proverbs 14:12:

We have here an account of the way and end of a great many self-deluded souls. 1. Their way is seemingly fair: It *seems right* to themselves; they please themselves with a fancy that they are as they should be, that their opinions and practices are good, and such as will bear them out. The way of ignorance and carelessness, the way of worldliness and earthly-mindedness, the way of sensuality and flesh-pleasing, seem right to those that walk in them, much more the way of hypocrisy in religion, external performances, partial reformations, and blind zeal; this they imagine will bring them to heaven; they flatter themselves in their own eyes that all will be well at last. 2. Their end is really fearful, and the more so for their mistake: It is *the ways of death*, eternal death; their iniquity will certainly be their ruin, and they will perish with a lie in their right hand. Self-deceivers will prove in the end self-destroyers.

2. We are to *immerse ourselves in the Word of God* so that we may learn to *replace worldly thinking with God's ways*. There are numerous places in God's Word in which we have this commended to us, commanded of us, and illustrated for us. I turned in the Scriptures looking for such a passage and fell on one section of Psalm 119 that speaks of this quite directly. It is in the third division of Psalm 119, under the Hebrew letter *gimel*.

¹⁷Deal bountifully with Your servant,
That I may live and keep Your word.

¹⁸Open my eyes, that I may see
Wondrous things from Your law.

¹⁹I am a stranger in the earth;
Do not hide Your commandments from me.

²⁰My soul breaks with longing
For Your judgments at all times.

²¹You rebuke the proud—the cursed,
Who stray from Your commandments.

²²Remove from me reproach and contempt,
For I have kept Your testimonies.

²³Princes also sit and speak against me,
But Your servant meditates on Your statutes.

²⁴Your testimonies also are my delight
And my counselors. (Psa. 119:17-24)

Here the psalmist illustrates a humble spirit, manifests a teachable heart, and conveys a commitment to believe and do what God instruct him to do. He acknowledges a weakness, even proneness to get these wrong, unless the Holy Scriptures instructed him in the right course.

3. In this way of reading and studying God's Word, immersing ourselves in its teachings and illustrations, over time we may *develop discerning minds* so that we recognize and repudiate worldliness in ourselves and others when we see it. As we apply the principles of God's Word, we grow in Christian maturity. God enables us more and more to be able to assess clearly and rightly the world about us as we walk in faith and obedience to Him.

The writer to the Hebrew Christians rebuked them for they had failed to order their lives in this way. We read in **Hebrew 5:11-14** these words:

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. ¹³For everyone who partakes only of milk is *unskilled in the word of righteousness*, for he is a babe. ¹⁴But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, *those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil*.

4. We are to *embrace in faith* and *act upon the truth* of God's Word even though it may not make sense to us or it runs counter to our own reasoning and desires. We are to order our lives according to His Word even though it may conflict with our natural way of thinking. We are to deny ourselves and we purpose to do the will of God.

I might cite the matter of financial stewardship as an example in this regard. I could think of no better illustration when I was working through this matter. The world tells us, and our own rational thinking tells us, that the way we may bring increase to our net worth is to hoard all you can and limit any expenditures. That makes "sense." But the Word of God reveals that the Lord has established spiritual laws within His creation that are in conflict with this natural way of thinking. And so we read God's Word that expresses this reality: "There is a severe evil which I have seen under the sun: riches kept for their owner to his hurt" (Eccl. 5:13). And then we read of God's promises: "

The generous soul will be made rich,
And he who waters will also be watered himself.
²⁶The people will curse him who withholds grain,
But blessing will be on the head of him who sells it. (Prov. 11:25)

And the Lord Jesus Himself taught His disciples,

"Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again. (Luke 6:36f)

This is a spiritual principle that is true because it is God's world and He has established both physical laws and spiritual laws by which He conducts His creation. And these "laws" are true and operative whether or not a Christian or a non-Christian obeys them. My father, who was no Christian until he professed faith in Christ on his death bed, ordered his entire business life with this principle of stewardship governing his own finances. He was a generous man who sought to give to people and causes in secret. He believed that whatever he sowed, he would reap. And the Lord blessed him according to His laws. This was the thinking of Western culture when it could still be said that all of society had a Christian world view. These days are gone, for the most part. But as Christians who read and study God's Word, we should see and live according to these spiritual laws that God has established for His creatures.

5. To the degree that we order our lives in this manner will be to the degree we encounter *the true blessing and power of God in our lives*. We might fall back on the illustration of stewardship to illustrate this truth. Solomon wrote these words to his son:

⁹Honor the LORD with your possessions,
And with the firstfruits of all your increase;
¹⁰So your barns will be filled with plenty,
And your vats will overflow with new wine. (Prov. 3:6 NKJ)

Here is the sowing and reaping principle.

Everything we have just said about addressing and correcting worldly thinking is capsulated in Romans 12:1f.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

This is the essence of what the Bible presents as spiritual warfare. There is much misunderstanding about spiritual warfare among Christians. All too often the spiritual battle we wage is presented as though it is between us and evil spiritual forces “out there.” No, *spiritual warfare has to do with battling wrong thinking that results in wrong behavior*. As we identify wrong belief and replace error with the truth of God’s Word, and as we conform our daily lives to that truth, we are winning battles of spiritual warfare. *Spiritual warfare is in the realm of understanding*. Listen to the classic passage that deals with this:

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh (for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but mighty before God to the casting down of strongholds), casting down *imaginings*, and every high thing that is exalted against *the knowledge* of God, and bringing every *thought* into captivity to the obedience of Christ; . . .” 2 Cor. 10:3-5.

Here we see quite clearly that the spiritual warfare we wage is largely in the realm of truth engaging, correcting, and dispelling error, truth that is set forth in the Holy Scriptures.

IV. Biblical principles that counter worldly thinking

Now after having laid out the basic idea of worldliness and provided a few illustrations, I would like us to consider some major principles of the Word of God that tend to run counter to worldliness, that is, sinful, worldly thinking.

A. Principle 1: Living unto Christ under human authority

Let me try and state the biblical truth/principle in a succinct way: *It is the will of God that each of us humbly serve and obey the human authorities that God has placed over us*.

Now, that is clear and simple enough, is it not? Why, then, do we not do it readily? Probably because we are worldly. We either have never heard of this principle, or we have misunderstood it, or we simply refuse to order our lives according to this principle. The fact is that we do not naturally want to submit to authority. This common reaction to authority began in the Garden of Eden when our first parents chose not to submit to God’s authority. Adam and Eve chose self-autonomy, rather than submit to the authority of God. And ever since that first act of rebellion, they and all their posterity have been characterized with this problem. It takes effort and resolve for a wife to submit to the authority of her husband. It takes effort and sometimes disciplinary action to train a son or daughter to be submissive to the authority of parents. Each of us has a natural or worldly inclination to assert his independence. We want to be in control of our own lives. We want to be our own gods. We do not readily want someone else to tell us what we have to do. We do not want to serve others; that is, we do not want to do their will. We want to do our will foremost, and woe to the one who wants us to do otherwise. But the fact is that God has ordained all human authorities and He has appointed them to have rule over us. We read Paul’s words in Romans 13:1 and 2:

“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.”

God has appointed human authorities over us in four areas of life. He has appointed authorities in our government, our home, our church, and in our place of occupation (or school). If we attempt to live in isolation of these God-ordained structures or live in defiance of the human authorities God has placed over us, it will not go well for us.

God uses these authorities to accomplish His purposes in His world. Through human authority He protects us, provides for us, purifies us, matures us, and He directs us in His will, which is the place of blessing. This is not to say that all people in these positions are true and faithful in their responsibilities of

authority. Too often they are not faithful which is to the detriment of those under them. Nevertheless, it is God's will is that each of us submit to, obey, and seek to serve the goals of those whom God has placed over us. Everywhere in Scripture we are admonished to submit to and serve those over us. And even the Lord Jesus, who was born to Mary, who had Joseph as his earthly father, submitted to His parents as unto the Lord. We read a summary of his youth in Luke 2:51f:

And He went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

Our Lord Jesus taught His disciples, "But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted" (Matt. 23:11). The Lord Jesus Himself was subject to human authority, and his attitude ('mind') should be ours (Cf. Phil. 2:5ff). The Lord Jesus taught His disciples to follow His example. We read in Luke 22:24ff,

"A dispute also arose among them, which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. And he said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For which is the greater, one who sits at table, or one who serves? Is it not the one who sits at table? But I am among you as one who serves."

When we submit to human authority, and we do so in faith, God will reveal Himself to us, powerfully working through that authority to bring glory to Himself and blessing to us. Consider the story of Joseph. What a beautiful example of a servant's spirit and how God acts when we obey Him by serving others. Let us consider **Genesis 39:1-6**.

Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. And Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him down there. ²The LORD was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. ³And his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD made all he did to prosper in his hand. ⁴So Joseph found favor in his sight, and served him. Then he made him overseer of his house, and all that he had he put under his authority. ⁵So it was, from the time that he had made him overseer of his house and all that he had, that the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had in the house and in the field. ⁶Thus he left all that he had in Joseph's hand, and he did not know what he had except for the bread which he ate.

Of course this illustrates the pattern in Joseph's life. Later the same outcome is recorded of Joseph's submission to the keeper of the prison to which he had been committed. And then eventually God's favor was shown to Joseph when he submitted to and served the pharaoh of Egypt, who made Joseph his prime minister. If we are submissive and obedient to our human authorities, God will exalt us and direct us through His sovereign control of those authorities.

Now in the matter of submission to human authorities, a few points should be remembered: (1) When an authority over us asks us to act in a certain manner that we believe to be wrong, we are to politely and respectfully appeal to the one in authority to change his/her mind.¹ (2) Submission to authority does not mean that we do not have responsibility in whatever relationship we find ourselves in submission. Joseph was granted increased responsibility in each of the three settings that God had placed him in Egypt. But he understood the limitations of that responsibility and of the authority that had been entrusted to him. (3) God uses all human authorities to accomplish His will in our lives regardless of whether they are Christian, "cooperative", or concerned about our welfare. And (4) the roles will one day be reversed for those who faithfully obey human authority in this life. "The first will be last and the last will be first."

¹ Consider the example of Daniel and his friends before pagan authorities in Babylon (Dan. 1).

The world and our own fallen natures is inherently opposed to all that we have said. Ever since the Garden of Eden we have wanted to be our own gods, free to do as we please. Or we think that at least if we are to submit, we condition our submission on if the one in authority wants to do it our way. We do not want God in heaven telling us how we are to live, and we certainly do not want a multiplicity of little gods in places of authority directing our lives. We “feel” that to yield to this principle would imprison us, bind us, and take away our freedom. A wife may struggle with this in her marriage. She claims that she wants her husband to lead her, but then she resists, manipulates, or pressures him until he leads her in the way she wants to go. She wears her husband down until he surrenders, “You just go ahead and do what you want to do. You are going to do so anyway.” This is a common issue in which husbands and wives engage one another.

In actuality the way of submission is the only way of blessing, joy, and peace. However, it does not make sense to us. It seems that is the way of misery and bondage. But it is not until we in faith obey God and His Word, and then we see and know the wisdom and the glory of God’s ways and His working in the lives of those He has placed over us. May God help us to understand and cease to be conformed to the world in this matter to the end that He might be glorified and that we might be blessed of Him.

B. Principle #2: Denial of self and of personal rights

This is a foundational teaching on the nature of the Christian life. Let me set forth the principle in a succinct form: *It is the will of God that we set aside our personal interests and well-being for the furthering of the will of God and the cause of Christ in the world.*

This principle of living is not natural to human nature. Human nature, that is, sinful human nature, is concerned preeminently with self, we might say, love for self. This is another manifestation of worldliness against which we are to resist, defeat, and correct in our lives. A person who is not born again of the Holy Spirit is preeminently concerned about his *own wellbeing*, about his *self-preservation*, *self-gratification*, and *self-advancement*. He wants to please himself. This is worldliness. But when a person is born again of the Holy Spirit a new spirit is implanted within him. This new principle is essentially a love for God and for His Son. Self-love is not removed from him, but his love for God and His Son becomes even greater than his love for himself. As a result, he is no longer concerned principally with his own interests and the advancement of his own name; rather, he desires to see God glorified. He wants to please God. He does, that is, unless through his own hardness of heart he has become worldly in his thinking.

In the passage of **Mark 8:27-38** we see how the principle is set before us both by the example and command of the Lord Jesus. We also see how easily we all may fail in this area in that even Peter is swayed by error and then is corrected by the Lord. Let us read this passage.

Now Jesus and His disciples went out to the towns of Caesarea Philippi; and on the road He asked His disciples, saying to them, “Who do men say that I am?”

²⁸So they answered, “John the Baptist; but some say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets.”

²⁹He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”

Peter answered and said to Him, “You are the Christ.”

³⁰Then He strictly warned them that they should tell no one about Him.

³¹And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³²He spoke this word openly. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. ³³But when He had turned around and looked at His disciples, He rebuked Peter, saying, “Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.”

We read, first, that the Lord confirmed to His disciples that He was the Messiah (8:27-30). The Lord Jesus had fully demonstrated in word and deed that He was the promised Messiah. Their formal

acknowledgment of the fact was at this point needful.² He then began to teach them that the Son of Man *must* suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and scribes, and be killed. This was at the heart of His mission as the Messiah--it was the will of His Father that He was to suffer. The Son of Man (the Lord's own title for Messiah) *must* suffer many things. Jesus was the promised Christ who would remove the curse of God from off the people of God. The curse was upon them both from the original fall of Adam and from their having broken the covenant that God had made with them through Moses. But then He declared to them that after 3 days He would rise again. And so, our Lord set before His disciples the nature of the will of God for Himself. He would suffer rejection, die, and then be raised from the dead.

But we read that the disciples rejected His mission as the Christ. He had spoken this word openly to them. But then we read that Peter took him aside and began to rebuke Him. But then we read that He rebuked Peter, saying, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men." In other words, Peter was seeing and assessing things from the perspective of the world.

Peter had rebuked Jesus, encouraging Him to save His own life. The Lord then rebuked Peter. Peter was rejecting God's design for Christ. Peter would not have Jesus be obedient to His Father's will. Of course Peter did not know what he was saying. But he was of the world. Worldlings are preeminently concerned about their own wellbeing, about their own self-preservation, self-gratification, and self-advancement. But the will of God for the Lord Jesus was to set aside His personal interests and wellbeing for the furthering of the will of God in the world. Jesus Christ would be obedient to His Father's will, not His own. Even if it meant suffering and death, He would not be deterred.

Jesus rebuked Peter, telling him that he was being led by satan when he espoused that he should serve his own interests. Jesus said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men." It is worldliness and satan that induces us to order our lives with the primary concern and motivation, "What's in it for me." Jesus was not concerned principally whether or not His needs were being met, whether or not His own well-being would be realized, for He sought rather to obey His Father in all things. The Lord then taught His Disciples that they, too, were to order their lives in this same way. We read in Mark 8:34-38:

³⁴When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. ³⁵For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. ³⁶For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? ³⁷Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? ³⁸For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."

The Lord Jesus made it clear that this was not only the path that He was to tread, but any and all who desired to share in His kingdom must follow this same path of faith.

This is a hard saying; at least, I should say, it is for the unregenerate person. But for the child of God who has been the object of saving grace, who has been born again by the Spirit of God, this is not a hard saying. It is "natural" for the Christian who possesses a new nature to love Christ supremely above all other loves. The Spirit of God has been given to us. He has shed abroad in our hearts the love for God that we currently possess. Oh yes, because we are creatures of the world and we are prone to worldliness, satan diverts us quite easily, just like Peter. But then because we have the Spirit of God, when we hear the truth we say, "Yes. That is right. Self-denial, submission to the will of Christ, that is what I truly want in my life."

² The question arises, however, why did Jesus tell His disciples to keep His identity a secret? (8:30). Mark's Gospel repeatedly records this message of Jesus that He gave on several occasions to people that He healed. "Do not tell others Who I am that has done this for you." So the question is asked, "Why not?" The answer is that the Jewish people of that day had a wrong understanding of the nature of the Messiah and His work. Had news been confirmed to the people, they would have immediately attempted to make Him a king according to their own wrong conceptions. His true work and mission would be jeopardized. And so, He told His disciples to keep the certainty of His Messiahship secret. But He made known to them Who He was in order that He could instruct them, His disciples, of His true mission.

As Christians, we deny self. That means we surrender our sense of independence from God. We acknowledge our need for His grace and strength to help us. We recognize and do acknowledge that He alone is our hope in this life and the life to come. We need Him and want Him.

How different from the world that essentially says, "I will have my own way. I am capable of ordering my life according to my will and I will be better off for doing so."

Here is a statement taken from a poster that was hung in a government correction facility in the commonwealth of Massachusetts. Listen to the utter worldliness of the sentiment and the assertions. It is essentially a declaration of self-independence from God and all others. It is a statement by an individual that she is the center of all things. It is entitled, "My Declaration of Self-Esteem"

I am me. In all the world, there is no one exactly like me. Everything that comes out of me is authentically mine, because I alone chose it. I own everything about me--my body, my feelings, my mouth, my voice, all my actions, whether they be to others or to myself, I own my fantasies, my dreams, my hopes, my fears. I own all my triumphs and successes, all my failures and my mistakes. Because I own all of me, I can become intimately acquainted with me. By so doing I can love me and be friendly with me in all my parts. I know that there are aspects about myself that puzzle me, and other aspects that I do not know, but as long as I am friendly and loving to myself, I can courageously and hopefully look for solutions to the puzzles and for ways to find out more about me. However I look and sound, whatever I say and do, and whatever I think and feel at any given moment in time is authentically me. If later some parts of how I looked, sounded, thought and felt turn out to be unfitting, I can discard that which is unfitting, keep the rest, and invent something new for that which I discarded. I can see, hear, feel, think, say, and do. I have the tools to survive, to be close to others, to be productive, and to make sense and order out of the world of people and things outside of me. I own me, and therefore I can engineer me. I am me and I am okay. –Virginia Satir

That is the kind of sentiment that would say to Jesus, "may it never be that you suffer and die." May God preserve us from that worldly spirit. May He enable us to humbly walk before Him in faith and obedience, and bow our shoulder to whatever cross that bring upon us.

In what ways are we to deny ourselves?

1. We purposefully lay aside our own interests for the sake of the will of God and for the benefit of others (Phil. 2:4).
2. We resolve to be more concerned about the wellbeing of others than for what might bring pleasure or benefit to us at the expense of others (1 Thess. 1:5).
3. We do not insist on having things *our* way (but we do insist that things be done God's way).
4. We refuse to indulge in those things that will re-enforce sin and error, although those things might be attractive and flesh-gratifying to us (1 Cor: 9:24-27).
5. We are willing to stand for the will of God even when it is not popular to do so or it will cost us for having done so (Mark 8:38).
6. When God in His providence removes or withholds things from us, we acquiesce to His will without murmuring and without bitterness (Jude 1:16).
7. When things do not go our way, we do not quit and run (2 Tim. 2:9-10).
8. We are willing to endure the abuse and affliction that others place upon us if it is comes to us because we are doing the will of God (Acts 9:16).
9. We are willing to endure the abuse and affliction that others place upon us if it is comes to us because we desire the spiritual well-being of those who are abusing or are afflicting us (2 Tim. 2:9-10).
10. We patiently wait on God for His timing to bring His blessing.
11. We live with a view to the future rather than for the moment (cf. Titus 2:11-13)
12. We refuse to order our thinking or lives based on what the world and our own flesh would have us do (also Titus 2:11-12).
13. We take the time to discipline ourselves through prayer and study of the Word of God.

What are the blessings of God that come to us when we deny ourselves?

1. We encounter a dissipation of anxiety (fear).
2. We cease to be characterized and controlled by anger.
3. We increasingly experience true freedom from the tyranny and guilt of sin.
4. We begin to see a recovery from past failure.
5. We increasingly see God using us to be of true spiritual help to others.
6. We experience true contentment.
7. We come to enjoy true joy regardless of what circumstances come to us.
8. We will ultimately inherit salvation.

In short, as we cease to be conformed to this world and we are transformed by the renewing of our minds, we begin to prove that the will of God is indeed “good, and acceptable, and perfect” (Rom. 12:2). We begin to see in fact what we at one time only saw in faith; indeed our Lord was right when He said, “whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it.” (Mark 8:35)

But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus,
after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. (1 Pet. 5:10)
