

## *Don't Be Self-Deceived! (#2)*

Joe Slater

We humans tend to be extremists. At birth we're totally dependent on others. Gradually our parents teach us to do things ourselves (tie shoes, brush teeth, etc.). But even independence can be taken to a destructive extreme. That's especially true in matters of the spirit.

Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going? Philosophers (ancient and modern) have tried to discover answers to such questions using human wisdom to examine the world around us and to look inward. Their conclusions have been dubious at best. By contrast Paul warned, *"Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise"* (1 Corinthians 3:18). Truth about eternal spiritual issues will never be discovered by looking inward, but God has revealed it in His word. However, *"the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God"* (1 Corinthians 1:18).

Even Christians can be caught up in "I can do it myself" extremism. Paul cautioned against self-reliance as he urged the Galatians to *"Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ"* (Galatians 6:2). In case any might think, "I never need anyone to help me with my life's burdens," the apostle continued: *"For if anyone thinks himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceives himself"* (v. 3).

We need God and His word, and we need each other! To think otherwise is to deceive yourself. Not one of us knows all the answers. Not one of us is without sin, so we cannot afford the luxury of looking down on each other. *"Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall"* (1 Corinthians 10:12).

## *What Is Your "Nazareth"?*

I always grin when I read Nathaniel's words in John 14:6 – *"Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"* I grin because his reaction to the idea of the Messiah coming from this village was so typical! We tend to make such assumptions, don't we? "I've seen people like that before – they never change." "We tried that years ago; it didn't work then, and it won't work now."

Even when we keep these assumptions to ourselves, they tend to work on us from the inside. They can limit what we do. They can damage our relationships, our interactions with others, and our effectiveness. Assumptions tend to give us tunnel vision and, what is worse, they put up walls that block the possibility of growth, reconciliation, or healing.

We form most of our assumptions from our own experiences, our own losses, and our own wounds. "I just don't see how anything good could come out of this!" Really? I'm thankful we serve a God who is not limited by our assumptions. In His wisdom, our God can bring up a boy raised in the backwater village of Nazareth and show the world that He is, in fact, the Savior of the world!

Through our faith in God the walls of assumption fall. It is through faith that we trust in God's ability to work great things where we see only dimly. It is this God who, when confronted by our petty and limiting assumptions, says (as does Philip in John 1:46), *"Come and see."*

--Larry Sullivan (Abilene, TX) via *Old Paths*

## THE ART OF SELF-DENIAL

One of the most difficult things for Christian people to practice is self-denial. Yet that is exactly what God expects of His people. If we allow ourselves every pleasure of our heart's desire, we'll become spoiled to the point where we will believe that we "deserve" all these things in order to be happy and content.

But the truth is, when we obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine (Rom. 6:17), we made a commitment to God to deny ourselves many of the pleasures in life in order to serve Him, the church, and other people. Jesus told His disciples, *"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."* (Luke 9:23). In the parallel passage in Matthew, Jesus asked, *"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).

To put it in our own terms, Jesus is asking, "What good will it do you if you have the grandest house, the best recreational vehicles, go on the best vacations, send your kids to the finest schools, attend the best parties, go to weekend sporting events, or get the big promotion at work, if it means you'll wind up on the wrong side of judgement. Will you exchange these temporary pleasures and then spend eternity in hell?"

Wow! That's pretty heavy stuff there Jesus! But it's exactly what He means. To make it even more difficult, our friends and neighbors are going to think we're crazy because we don't take part in every social event that's happening (1 Peter 4:4). When we are totally committed to Christ, we'll make these sacrifices in order to serve our heavenly Father and in the end, it will be worth it all. Jesus also said, *"For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it."* (Matt. 16:25)

--Jay Launius (Maud, TX)