

# “THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

## A Grand Delusion

By John C. Robertson

It is likely that you know of one that has fallen away from the Lord. The person lost interest and no longer worships the Lord. To know that they live in sin is heart wrenching. You want desperately to say or do something that can turn them back to the Lord. This short article may be something you can send to them that may change their lives back to God (James 5:20).

### What caused the defection?

The devil has deluded their minds. What they see is not reality. The apostle Paul writes, *“And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled in them that perish: in whom the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving that the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should not dawn upon them”* (2 Cor. 4:3-4). One may summarily say that the fallen one has displayed a love for this world of sin that is greater than their love for God.

### What are the fallen seeing that is not true or real?

Jesus said, *“For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest haply they should perceive with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should turn again and I should heal them”* (Matt. 13:15).

When asked why they do not attend worship the answers are often, *“the people there are hypocrites.”* Others may say, *“the people there are mean and unloving.”* Still others may say, *“My parents forced me to go to church and were unreasonable about the matter.”*

The more the fallen speak the greater the details of their defection emerge. The cause of their defection from the Lord is that people disappointed them. Are there hypocrites, mean, and unloving people at the church assembly? Unfortunately, this is a true assessment in many places. The cause of their fall is evident. The fallen Christian permitted the erring among the church to take their faith away. In such a case, their faith was not in God but rather in people. People will always disappoint yet God never does (Heb. 13:5).

## The Solution

It may sound overly simplistic, but the solution is to put faith in God rather than man. Man cannot save himself much less anyone else. Man’s tongue often is abusive and hurtful (James 3:8). A man’s demeanor can be mean and ugly. We have all had to fight urges of frustration and grumpiness that brings about hurtful things said. Knowing that I have sinned with my tongue and demeanor toward others helps me be more willing to give others the benefit of the doubt.

On the other hand, anyone that has been a member of the church for a while knows that there are, unfortunately, mean people in the building at assembly times. These people are not momentarily grumpy or frustrated but rather irritable daily. It is among these that we say, *“The Lord is my helper; I will not fear: what shall man do unto me?”* (Heb. 13:6)

Don’t let anyone or anything take your faith and eternal reward from you! Put your faith in God and he will not disappoint. To do otherwise is to permit the devil to delude your mind so that you do not see what should be seen. ■

## “Let Him Deny Himself”

By Heath Rogers

**“Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me’”** (Matt. 16:24). Disciples are followers. In going to the cross, Jesus was denying Himself and suffering for the will of the Father. If anyone will be the Lord’s disciple, they must likewise deny themselves, take up their cross, and then they can follow him.

The word deny is translated from the Greek word *aparneomai*. This is a compound word: *arenomai*, which means **“to deny,”** joined with the prefix *apo*, which serves to intensify the meaning. The idea is to deny utterly or fully. This is the same Greek word used to describe Peter’s denial of the Lord (Matt. 26:75). When Peter said, **“I do not know the man,”** he was completely disowning the Lord. In our text, Jesus is calling for this same action to be applied to self.

Although they are related, denying self is not the same as self-denial. We practice self-denial or self-control when we give up things or activities for a particular cause or benefit (we diet to lose weight, cut back on spending to save money, etc.). Although this action has application to the life of a Christian, this is not what Jesus is calling for in our passage. He is calling for us to deny self – totally and completely; to surrender our entire being to Him.

**Not Limited.** Denying self is not something that can be compartmentalized and applied to various aspects of our lives as we see fit. This instruction must be understood and observed in its fullest extent. Matthew Henry gave the following comment regarding the application of this requirement: *“We must deny ourselves absolutely, we must not admire our own shadow, nor gratify our own humour; we must not lean to our own understanding, nor seek our own things, nor be our own end”* (p. 192).

**Not Optional.** Denying self is not a characteristic of a “super” Christian or an extremely devoted disciple. It is not an optional path to a closer walk with Christ, nor a means of taking one’s relationship with God to a higher level. Denying self is, in fact, the most basic step of discipleship. It is universal in its application. Anyone who would become a disciple of Christ must first deny self, otherwise they cannot be a disciple. Yet, this essential element is sorely lacking among many who see themselves as Christians today.

**Not Easy.** Denying self is difficult because it involves a price that few are willing to pay. It requires the surrender of self. Paul described it as crucifying self (Gal. 2:20). We must acknowledge that we are not our own (1 Cor. 6:19-20) and admit we need guidance from One higher than ourselves (Jer. 10:23). Such is a steep price for many in today’s world. We are taught that our ideas matter, our voice deserves to be heard, and our dreams deserve to be fulfilled. Some simply are not willing to give that up and allow God complete control over their lives.

Denying ourselves shifts the focus of our life. It is no longer about us. This old self must be denied and disowned. God is to become the center of our lives, which is accomplished only when we center our lives around Him. The implications of Jesus’ demand to deny self are life changing and far reaching, but they are not easy. ■

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## Something Learned from Mules

By W.R. Jones

A mule can’t pull while he’s kicking, and when he is pulling, he won’t be kicking. It is the same in the church. When saints have their feet in the sand pulling hard to do the will of God, there is no time for kicking, nit-picking and complaining. To the contrary, when we are given to kicking, gossip, and idleness we never move the gospel chariot forward. Also, when one has two or more mules hitched together, they have to pull at the same time to move the load. This is also true in the Lord’s church. Pulling ‘together’ accomplishes great things. ■

Service Times - Sunday: 9:00 & 10:00 AM; 6:00 PM - Wednesday: 7:00 PM

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