

Fantastic Future: Let Go of Rights (Dominion)

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Jan. 30, 2011

Texts: Heb. 12:1-3, Phil. 2:5-11, (James 4:1-10)

We are continuing our discussion of possible New Year's Resolutions items. The Lord has been leading me through this series, and we come to the next item to "Let Go of..."

Jesus said in the gospels (Matt. 16:34, Mark 8:32, Lu. 9:23), "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." NIV

This is considered by many Jesus' most basic teaching on living the Christian life. An unimaginable number of writers and preachers of sermons, books, commentaries and lectures have offered their insights on this passage throughout the thousands of years of the Church. We will consider this whole passage in the future, but I would like to lift just one portion to consider, "Deny themselves." This must be the most outrageous thing Jesus ever said to people. Hugh Hefner writes: "We reject any philosophy which holds that a man must deny himself for others." This from one who is almost worshiped as an icon of today's culture, as far as the media is concerned, is appalled by Jesus' word.

A number of years ago my wife, precious Lou, and I heard a teaching on how the way we exercise personal rights affects our relationships with each other and God. It was new and rather controversial, but as my understanding of the Bible has grown it's truth has become apparent. Since we are talking about letting go of certain habits and attitudes for our resolutions, I think it would be appropriate to talk about letting go of **RIGHTS**. I know, I know...our whole culture has been built on the concept of maintaining our "**inalienable rights**." And, not only America, but that of the whole western civilization since the 18th century. The pursuit and protection of individual rights is sacred, practically worshipped everywhere you turn. Anyone who says anything otherwise is often considered down-right un-American, if not a communist. Maintaining our personal rights is as American as John Wayne and baseball.

So, for someone to suggest that we should deny ourselves or "let go of" our "inalienable rights" for something more important is difficult to even discuss, much less consider as a way of life. To many there is nothing more important than their personal rights. But, that is exactly what Jesus is suggesting, **NO, requiring**. This is no mild suggestion; the imperative "must" is used in most translations elevating it to absolute-requirement status. Part of the whole discussion on the subject has been the question, "**Is this a requirement for all believers?**"

JOHN WESLEY said in his sermon on "Self Denial,"

The denying ourselves...is not a thing of small concern...it is absolutely, indispensably necessary, either to our becoming or continuing his disciples. It is absolutely necessary, in the very nature of the thing, to our coming after him, and following him; insomuch that, as far as we do not practice it, we are not his disciples. If we do not continually deny ourselves, we do not learn of him, but of other masters... we do not come after him, but after the world, or the prince of the world, or our own fleshly mind. If we are not walking in the way of the cross we are not following him, we are not treading in his steps, but going back from... him.

I believe John Wesley was quite clear that it is essential for anyone who calls himself a Christian. Denying self-interests is what Jesus was talking about when he said,

“For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.” Matt. 16:25

Why is this necessary? God made us to look after ourselves and “have dominion over the world.” Doesn’t that mean we should get all we can from the world and all that is in it? That is how many over the ages took those famous words from Genesis ch. 1. Many empires have been built on that premise, not the least of which, the Holy Roman Empire, the Spanish, the British, and the country we know as the United States of America, known as “divine right.” I won’t expound on that now.

Insisting on and enforcing one’s rights is deeply rooted in our attitudes and way of life. I love the story about a rich man in Springfield, Illinois many years ago, who insisted that a certain poor man owed him \$2.50. When the claim was denied, the rich man decided to sue him. He contacted a young lawyer named Lincoln, who at first hesitated to take the case. On second thought he agreed -- if he'd be paid a fee of \$10 cash in advance. The client readily produced the money, whereupon Lincoln went to the poor man and offered him \$5 if he would immediately settle the alleged debt. Thus Lincoln received \$5 for himself, the poor man got \$2.50, and the claim was satisfied. The rich man foolishly paid four times the original debt, just to gain his rights.

Our insistence on having our rights is one of the greatest sources of anger and hostility. It usually has behind it a fear that we will lose our rights if we don’t demand they be honored. For those who were mistreated as children, this can be a very powerful motivation to defend one’s honor and demand respect. Being “diss’ed” as it is called, seems to be behind much of the youth violence of those who grew up with little in the way of respect or possessions. Being respected is a great goal, but too often it means gaining it by the use of fear and violence.

When we follow Christ in giving up our rights we find a new freedom from fear and anxiety. We find that all we have is not ours nor is it ultimately up to us to provide or protect it. It is all God’s stuff and God places it in our hands to use as we choose. Jesus shows us the best way to use it beginning with realizing that it isn’t ours in the first place. Sure, we spent the hours and years working to gain it, but it is really all a gift from God. When we relieve ourselves of the responsibility of ownership of our possessions and property, we can be more free to be useful to God. We don’t have to spend all our

waking and much of our sleeping hours worrying about it and how to get more. That is part of what Jesus meant by deny yourself – give up our insistence on having our own way in everything. Yes, we have much knowledge, experience and talent to offer, but we are learning how to be guided by God's Holy Spirit to employ it for God's work. God will see that we have what we need and he uses resources and methods we cannot begin to grasp. But, know this, God has all we need and wants to give it to us freely. By cooperating with his Spirit in serving those whom we find in need we open a channel of blessing that will bless everyone along the way, including ourselves. There is great joy and peace to be found in no longer being in charge of our lives.

So I challenge you to trust God and **LET GO** of your rights to control everything in your life. Bill Wilson, Eugene, OR. found that,

- To let go does not mean to stop caring, it means I can't do it for someone else.
- To let go is not to cut myself off, it's the realization I can't control another.
- To let go is not to enable, but to allow learning from natural consequences.
- To let go is to admit powerlessness, which means the outcome is not in my hands.
- To let go is not to try to change or blame another, it's to make the most of myself.
- To let go is not to care for, but to care about.
- To let go is not to fix, but to be supportive.
- To let go is not to judge, but allow another to be a human being.
- To let go is not to be in the middle arranging all the outcomes, but to allow others to affect their own destinies.
- To let go is not to be protective, it's to permit another to face reality.
- To let go is not to deny, but to accept.
- To let go is not to nag, scold or argue, but instead to search out my own shortcomings and correct them.
- To let go is not to adjust everything to my own desires, but to take each day as it comes and cherish myself in it.
- To let go is not to regret the past, but to grow and live for the future.
- To let go is to fear less and love more.

So let go of your rights to determine everything in your life and you will find that you get back much more as privileges along with joy, peace and sleep.