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Issues: Dying to Self

Jerry Arnold

“Father in Heaven, we are here today to hear from You. As we open Your word, we are praying. We are praying that You would be the One who would teach us; You will be the One who will lead us in thought, and that You will be the One who explains Your word to us. We ask Heavenly Father that it will be so real and so powerful that everyone here will know they have heard from You. And I pray Heavenly Father that truth will be experienced today. Freedom will be realized today, and everyone will know they have been with You. We ask and pray this in Jesus Name, Amen.”

This is our third sermon about issues. We concluded our series of sermons on the *Life of Joseph*, and we are going to begin one on the *Life of Elijah* in the near future. But what I offered to the congregation, or to those who are visiting, is that if they have issues, questions, or subjects that they have questions about, to submit those to the office, and I will seek to address some of them. So this is a third one, it's: *Issues: Dying to Self*. Now this came to me, and I am going to read what was given me. “The phrase, *Dying to Self* has often confused me. It has been used in some very difficult circumstances in my personal life, and in the lives of those around me. For example, growing up I often heard my mother say to herself, through her tears, “When are you going to die to yourself?” This occurred right after she had gotten her feelings hurt by my Dad's lack of understanding or empathy.”

“A lady I know moved out of her husband's home after nearly thirty years of marriage. It's been said about her, ‘she didn't die to herself,’ as if she is seeking her own pleasure of her own will. The fact is her husband never worked a day in his life to earn income. She supported him and their daughter financially. After the separation, she reported that she suffered years of physical and emotional abuse. I am talking about a Christian couple. And yet, *Dying to Self* is a phrase used to describe her, not him. He has some extreme doctrinal views and has completely isolated himself from any kind of church for many years... When I went through some trouble several years ago, I considered divorcing my spouse. I was told on more than one occasion, ‘The hardest thing is to die to yourself.’ Paul was often quoted as saying: “Count yourself dead to sin but alive to Christ.” It's in Romans, somewhere. Or, “I need to die so Christ can live,” or “I die daily to myself,” 1st Corinthians 15:31, etc.”

“I believe that dying to self is the work of the Holy Spirit in us. We do need to seek daily to be dead to our selfish desires, human nature, our will, and to seek to do His will. It's a daily battle. I am sure there is a much deeper theological explanation or meaning of that phrase. I only wished it wasn't used in such complicated and hard situations as to cause resentment instead of a blessing. I hope this gives you some idea of the nature of my question.”

Dying to Self! I'm sure many of you have heard that phrase. *Dying to self* is not a Biblical phrase. It does not appear in the Bible. In fact, the word “Self” only occurs six times in the Bible. And “Self” is never told nor is it ever encouraged to die. The word, “Selfish” does not even appear in the Bible which I found rather astonishing. I didn't realize that until this week. In a concordance, if you look up -- a concordance is a large book that would have all the words of the Bible alphabetically, and you look them up, and it will show you the text where they are used. When you come to the word, “Self,” the next word is

“Selfsame” which is old English and was rejected by my spell check on the computer. “Self, Selfsame, Self-willed,” then the word, “Sell.” And I don’t know how many sermons I have heard about selfish or dying to self, and yet, those words do not even appear in the Bible.

There are two passages that are mentioned in the letter. First Corinthians 15 verse 31 and Romans 6 verse 11. It will be our purpose today to seek to understand what those verses meant when Paul wrote them. What did it mean to the people he wrote them to, and then we can make an application to ourselves? Let’s go first to First Corinthians 15 verse 31. Paul wrote this: “I affirm by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily.” “I die daily.” What does he mean? Well, I know what some people have turned it to mean. They have taken it out of context. It’s called, “Homiletical license.” Homiletics is preaching. So they’ve taken the phrase that they like, “I die daily,” and they’ve used it to describe an experience that it doesn’t mean. And consequently, because the Word of God is not used properly, it causes confusion.

To say, “I die daily,” many people associate that with the experience of somebody spiritually coming up with their will against God’s will. And that does happen, and that is a struggle, and that is an issue. But that is not what Paul is talking about here. We have to look at it in its context. First, we’ll look at it in its larger context, then we’ll look at it in its smaller context. Look at First Corinthians 15 verse 1. “Moreover brethren, I declare to you the Gospel which I preach to you, which also you received and in which you stand. By which also you are saved if you hold fast that word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I deliver to you first of all that which I also received. That Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.” Then Paul goes on.

The entirety of chapter 15 in First Corinthians is dealing with the resurrection. Apparently people were concerned. Folks were dying. Jesus hadn’t returned. What happens? So Paul spends this entire chapter dealing with the resurrection. Okay, that’s important. That’s the larger context. What is the smaller context? That’s when it gets interesting. Look at verse 29. In verse 29 it says, “Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead do not rise at all, why then are they baptized for the dead?” Now this is a very controversial verse. Some people say it simply cannot be saying that. It must be a mistranslation in the Bible. Others say, well, it’s misunderstood and it has different meanings than what people actually believe it has because how would you be baptized for somebody who is dead?

And literally, what it means for some people is that if John had died, then I would be baptized in place of John and for John. It would be a vicarious baptism. Well, people think that can’t be, so they say things like, “It must mean being baptized in the likeness or the memory of those who were baptized but now have died.” So if John had been a good believer, and I’m baptized, you know, for him or let’s see, got mixed up. I’m baptized for the dead; it would be just an association with him. Kind of like, when I was in the second grade and at first communion. And we had to pick a saint to be our saint. I chose Dominique. I don’t remember what Dominique did, but I liked the sound of it. So my name there is Jerry Douglas Dominique Arnold. Now that’s a good name, I liked it. So I chose Dominique.

So it would be kind of like that – baptized for the dead. Other scholars argue that there is no historical record for the practice. And they do identify the practice by the second sanctuary, by the Gnostics or Gnostic like groups. But they say there is no record of anybody in Christianity being baptized for somebody who is dead. Some say it was associated with a superstitious, magical view of baptism. That you couldn't be saved unless you are baptized; and so, if somebody was studying the Bible and preparing to become a follower of Jesus, maybe they've accepted Jesus? And somehow they die, but they haven't been baptized, somebody else would be baptized in their place so that they can go to heaven. Others say none of these are acceptable. It is simply a mistranslation. It can't actually say this in the Greek.

Well, the best Greek scholars agree on one thing. There is no mistranslation here. It's says what it says. People apparently were baptized for the dead. So what do we do with that? Well, typically what we do is we fight over it. We argue, we fuss, and we carry on. But in doing so we don't catch the point. Apparently it was happening. Paul does not say whether it was good, Paul does not say whether it was bad, that isn't the issue. The resurrection is the issue, this is simply an illustration. He is saying, "Why are you baptized for the dead if you don't even believe in the resurrection? So he is not saying, that's a good thing, he is not saying that's a bad thing; he is just saying, "Why do you do it if you don't believe in the resurrection?" It's simply an illustration.

We go to verse 30. He says, "Why do we stand in jeopardy every hour?" That means, "danger, peril, to be in danger..." The New International Version says, "Why do we endanger ourselves every hour?" Paul is beginning to describe that his life is a life of danger. Then we come to our verse. "I affirm by the boasting in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily." So we are talking about the resurrection, we are talking about danger; we are talking about danger on every hand. When Paul says, "I die daily," contextually what it means is, his life is so filled with trials, persecutions, dangers, and hardships, he is every day facing death. Why would he do that if there was not a resurrection? That's his point. Why would I face death every day if I could just live any way I wanted to, and every day, as long as I am alive? Because if there is no resurrection we die anyway, so we might as well just eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die.

And that's what he says in the next verse. Notice what he says, verse 32: "If in a manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage is it to me? If the dead do not rise, let us eat, drink, for tomorrow we die." Paul is saying, "Look! My life is lived on the edge. I have fought with beasts at Ephesus." Now, he did not fight with creatures at Ephesus; he was a Roman citizen. They didn't put Roman citizens in the arena to be attacked by wild beasts. He is talking about fierce adversaries. He is talking about people who are trying to take him out. He says, "My life is lived that way every day. I die daily. But I walk in the hope of a resurrection. And if I should lose my life, it's all right because I'll be raised to life." That's his point.

"I die daily." "I die every day," it says in the New International Version. So when Paul says, "I die daily," he is speaking of the dangers of his life and how the hope of resurrection keeps him going. It has been used in preaching to describe the need of a person to surrender their will to God. It is used to describe

the need to walk in the Spirit and not in the flesh. And all those things are important, and those are true. But this phrase is not talking about that. It has been used, abusively, generally against women who are married to cruel husbands and they are seeking some type of relief.

We'll let's go to Romans 6 verse 11 and see what that passage means. Romans 6 verse 11, Paul again is the writer. He is writing to the church at Rome. He says in verse 11, "Likewise you also reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus, our Lord." "...reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin." The word "reckon" is a legal word of the court and it is also an accounting term in business. It means to accept something as certain. It is a fact. It is not an experience. It is not based on emotions; it is not based on how you feel, it is not even describing a spiritual condition. It is a fact before God that in Christ we are like Him. Jesus is dead to sin, if we are in Christ, so are we. Let me demonstrate that to you. Look at verse 10. "For the death that He died..." that's Jesus, "...He died to sin once for all. But the life that He lives, He lives to God."

Now the next verse, "Likewise you also..." So Jesus is the example. "Likewise you also reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord." Paul is saying, "Look! In Christianity, we are going to have difficulties. We will have doubts, we will have discouragements, we will fail. And so we will often feel like, we can't be with God. We must not be walking with the Lord because our performance is not coming up to a high enough level. This passage is to tell you that Jesus died to sin once for all, that Jesus is alive and lives to God, and if you are in Jesus, so have you. It is a legal standing before God. You are declared righteous, you are declared justified, you are declared holy before God, and you are not to depend on how you feel about it, but apply your faith to what God says about it.

John Wesley wrote a poem about this thing because what happens is, somebody becomes a Christian, and they are told, "Well, you need to die daily" and "You need to die to yourself" and all this type of stuff. And so they think that they are actually going to die to self. And somehow it's going to die. Self does not die, I hope you understand that. It hangs around 'till you die. Then "self" is dead. It'll be there. As long as you are, it is there. And there will be a struggle. And there will be doubts and you will be tempted to do things that you thought you would be never be tempted to do. Just don't yield. That's it. But, in the temptation process, many people get discouraged. "I must not be dead to self. I must not be living right," or "Why would I be tempted to do this?" Or, "Why would that thought flesh through my mind?" Well it's there because you are sinful being. But praise God you are saved by a sinless being, Jesus Christ.

Now, so Wesley wrote this: "Frames and feelings fluctuate. These can near thy Savor be, learn thyself in Christ to see. Then be feelings what they will, Jesus is thy Savior still." So regardless of how you feel, it's Jesus. And that's what Paul is saying in this passage: "Reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin." And perhaps the emphasis in the passage ought to be, "...alive to God!" Are you alive to God? Are you embracing life as a good thing, as a wonderful thing, as an adventure? Or are you so afraid of making a mistake, so afraid of doing something wrong, so afraid of not being dead to self that life is a virtual round of pain and difficulty because everything is an issue! God doesn't want you to live your life that way. Humanity is set free from the condemnation of sin and death. We are able to be alive now and for

eternity. Our lives are set free in Christ. Free to live with dignity. Free to live with purpose, free to live with hope. We are not set free to live impoverished lives where our only goal is to shrivel-up and die to self. We are to live!

Now there are people that take extreme positions about dying to self. Really what it says here is, "...consider yourself dead to sin." You should die to sin. And it goes on to say – and I didn't include it in our thing, but don't let sin reign in your mortal body. Don't let it be king anymore. You'll still be tempted, but don't yield. Here is an extreme position. "It is sinful for me to get my needs met." "It is sinful to expect to be treated with respect." "It is sinful to confront someone who is wicked and cruel." "It is sinful to demand that behaviors that hurt us must stop." Those are extreme positions and they are not Biblical. I want you to use your common sense. Think about this. If seeking to get my needs met is sinful, then seeking to meet other people's needs is sinful as well. In another words, here is my wife, Karen. If I discover she has a need that I can help her with, by seeking to help her with that need, I would be causing her to sin because she is getting her need filled.

Listen, the Bible teaches us about love. We are to love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and we are to love our neighbor how, as our selves! You cannot seek other people's needs if you haven't had your own needs taken care of. It is not selfish. It is your right and your dignified position with God. God frees you so you can have your needs met. He takes you out of the enslavement of sin so you can have your needs met. And it's not sinful saying, "I have a need." You know, it's like the airplane. They will tell you. You have a child next to you, if the oxygen things come down, what do they tell the parent? Take care of your needs first or you are never going to be able to help the child. You put the mask on first, then you put the child's mask on. You are asked by God, you are given an opportunity by God to have your needs met. And it's not a sin.

What about abusive people in our lives? Are we just supposed to take it? Die to self? That spouse that is physically or emotionally abusive or both; "Just take it? It's the cross you have to bear. Just take it." That attitude empowers evil and it's wrong. It's not of the Scriptures. It's of a sentimental concept of religion that frankly stinks. And it's weakened Christianity on every level. We are not defenseless, and God doesn't want us to live defenseless lives. If we are in a situation where we can stop somebody from abusing us, God wants us to stop it. He doesn't want us to take it. There will be very rare but possible experiences where we can't stop abuse. We have to bear-up under that. But here in this country especially, we don't have to take abuse. There is legal system that can stop it if we don't stop it personally.

Let me give you an example. And right now, some of you are going to bail out on your support for what I'm saying. But it's okay, I still love you. Others of you, like from the last two services will line up and say, "Pastor, it's about time somebody said what is true." So I don't know which side you'll be on? But I want you to know, I love you anyways. My daughter, Hanna was young. I have a daughter and two boys. I played rough with the boys. I wanted them to be men. I wanted them not to be limp-wrist sissies who just... you know, whatever. I wanted them to be men. And I wanted them to be able to defend their family someday if they had to, and to defend themselves. My daughter wanted in on that. And at first, I

was a little resistant. And then when I saw the way that she hit, I thought, “No, I’ve got to help her.” You know, girls, they just, “hah, hah, hah” they just kind of... I don’t know what it is, why girls just don’t know how to hit? So I taught her how to make fists. I taught her how to punch; I used to box. I taught her how to jab, how to do the cross. How to come across, how to do the uppercut; I taught my daughter how to hit.

Why? I wanted her to defend herself if she ever needed to. When she was in the eighth grade, her class went on a trip to the conference camp. And while they were there, some eighth grade boy grabbed her on the breast. My daughter decked him! (The audience applauding), that’s right! And he was down for the count. I want you to know something. He never sought to grab her again. She put an end to the abuse. I have a niece. She came to school here at Southern. I had a hard time believing the story, but my niece doesn’t lie. So I know it took place. There was a girl, in college, a nursing student, who had a problem with biting people. Now she is a young adult, and she is biting people. She bit my niece. My niece told her to stop it. And the girl said, “I can’t. It’s just a habit I have.” My niece said, “My little brother had that habit, and I cured him. You bite me again, and I’ll cure you.” And you know a couple of days later, that young adult bit my niece again, and my niece decked her. She never got bit again.

I know. I’ve read the stories that you have, of how cookies and a sweet disposition have won the bully over to the side of one abused. But I’m telling you, that doesn’t happen very often. What does happen in reality is when somebody makes it too uncomfortable for that bully to act, that bully stops acting. Every parent here, listen to me carefully, if you have young children, make sure that you give them some type of martial arts training, so that they can defend themselves out there in the world. I’m going to do that for my grandchildren. And if your kids grow up to be bullies, my grandkids are going to grow up to stop them from being a bully to them. It is Biblical. You are not just to subject yourself to abuse when you can stop it. And unfortunately, so many people have been told it’s wrong to try to stop it. They have become the proverbial welcome mat of abuse.

And it strips them of their dignity, and it strips them of the position and calling that God has for them. It is not right. You have rights as a Christian. Jesus even sought for His rights during His trial. You can read the story, John 18:19-23. Jesus is on trial before Caiaphas, and Caiaphas said, “Tell me what You taught and tell me about Your disciples.” And Jesus said, “No. You bring in the witnesses. I taught openly. You bring in the witnesses and have them say what they heard.” And when that was spoken, the soldier that was there who was the temple guard, slapped Jesus and said, “Why do you talk to the High Priest that way?” And Jesus said, “Look, if I’ve said something wrong, tell me.” What Jesus was saying in that situation, in their court system, you did not stand before a judge and answer for yourself. You answered to what the witnesses said about you. They had no witnesses. Eventually they brought in witnesses, and they even contradicted themselves.

Jesus was saying, “I have a right! And I have right to be tried fairly and this isn’t right.” And when He is slapped, He is saying to that soldier, “What have I said wrong? It’s the court! It’s the way it’s supposed to be.” When Paul was arrested, and they are about to beat him, he said to the Roman’s soldiers, “Is it right to beat a Roman citizen without a trial?” He had rights, he knew his rights and he wasn’t going to

be abused, if he could stop it. Unfortunately, Jesus did not get a fair trial. But He asked for one. He submitted Himself to their abuse, and died on the cross. But He rose from the dead. And He conquered death. And in Him, so do we.

Friends, God has given you title to heaven. And with that title comes dignity and personal respect. Theologically, dying to self probably means or is probably describing a process of learning to trust God so much that we are able to say, "Not my will, but Your will be done." It is not God's will for you to suffer abuse if you can stop it. He wants you to be strong enough in Him to do what is best and to do what is right. Now today, as I close the sermon, I really, really want your attention what I am going to say. If there is anybody here in a marriage with a spouse that is abusive, and you don't know what to do, I want you to contact the church office. We have three pastors here. We will get involved. We will confront the abuser. If necessary, we will have the police get involved.

And now this is really, really important. Children, children I want every one of you to hear me. If there is any child here, that somebody in your life, I don't care who that person is. If anybody in your life has touched you in your private parts, I want you to know you don't have to take that. You don't have to take that. Get in touch with Pastor Kevin. Talk to me, talk to Pastor Tom, we will support you. You will be okay. You will be protected. You do not have to take abuse. Friends, God is calling us to life in Jesus. He is not calling us to just lie down and be without choice. To lie down and be without dignity; to lie down and let, "Well, whatever happens, let it happen." No, He wants you to look at the abuser in the eye and say, "It stops here. You will never talk to me that way again. You will never touch me that way again. It stops, and it stops now. And if you touch me again, the next touch to you will be the city police. And they are going to drag you out of here. I am not putting up with it anymore." That my friends is the dignity that God gives you in Christ.

So today as we conclude, I am just wondering if there is anyone here who would like to say, "You know Lord, I want a life that is whole. I want a life that has dignity. I want Jesus, and I want to be alive to God." If you want to say this, then I am going to ask you to stand right where you are at. "Father in Heaven, it's a difficult subject today. But it's real world, real time, and real experience for many people. And I pray Your blessing upon everyone here. And I pray that they will embrace the life that you offer in Jesus. And I pray Heavenly Father that you'll give them the strength to stand up to an abuser, that You will give them the courage to know that it's their right to stop it. And I pray Heavenly Father that in all that is done, You will receive glory and honor and praise. And we ask this in Jesus name, Amen."