"[24]Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."

Matthew 16:24

If any man will come after Me let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever shall lose his life for My sake shall find it."

These words of Jesus take on a meaning for the Child of God that reaches to the very foundation of willingness to commit to God. It zeros in on our priorities as nothing else does. This speaks to the heart and soul of the modern-day Christian's difficulty committing to Jesus Christ. So much of what we consider living gets in the way of our choosing Jesus that living has complicated our relationship with Jesus.

When we were first created, it was very clear who was the focal point of Adam and Eve's existence. God was at the very center of their lives. Before God created Adam and Eve, God prepared for them a world they could use. A world filled with the necessities as well as the desires of their hearts. What God created for Adam and Eve could be called "things." In fact, that is what we call them today. We use other words to describe them, like "stuff." We assign stuff certain value designations and they gain a level of importance and "things" that were not important suddenly are. Things that did not have priority now have priority. Let us be clear these things that were created were meant to be used by man. However, they were always meant to be external to man. They were not meant to control men and women and

reshape the heart or soul of their relationship with God. The heart of man, the heart of Adam and Eve is to belong to God. God was to be the center of man's life. God was to be enshrined in the heart of men and women.

This scripture raises the singular requirement needed to follow Jesus. This scripture sets before us the most daunting of obstacles we as Christians have when it comes to following Jesus. "If any man or woman will come after Me let him deny himself." Jesus is saying if anyone has a desire to follow Me; if anyone makes up in their minds that they want to follow me, "They must deny themselves and take up their cross." In this one text Jesus unfolds for those who choose to follow Him what following Him means.

Following Jesus does not simply mean walking with Him, learning from Him. It involves a relationship, a spiritual relationship that reshaped and transformed your life. Taking up the cross was entering your own Garden of Gethsemane where the heart and the mind is tested by God's Holy Spirit to determine if you are really willing to offer yourself up to God as a living sacrifice. A walking sacrifice that surrenders to the will of God. The Garden of Gethsemane was a symbol of the cross for Jesus in that it cleared His heart and mind of any doubt that may have attempted to enter in. Likewise, today if we would commit to Jesus, if we would serve Jesus we must make the cause of Jesus first.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, we see "things" get in the way of Jesus for a moment. We see the pain of the cross, the suffering of the cross get in the way of Jesus. Today the "things" of the world give us as

much pain and suffering as the cross gave to Jesus. Our cross is not the Roman government. Our cross are the “things” in our lives that get in the way of serving Jesus Christ and would cause us much pain and suffering if we were deny ourselves access to them. Everyone has their individual cross that must be born if we would truly commit to Jesus. There is a war that we fight and the Holy Spirit fights with and for us every day against what is in opposition to God being on the throne of our lives. How often have we – you and me – allowed our appetites and desires to take over our lives? How often have we entered into commitments that bind us to “things” that eventually destroyed our lives or severely disrupted them. How many people have we seen buy homes and work their hands to the bone just to have a bigger house. This “thing” became the center of our lives. It is this “thing” we are forced to make a commitment with that wreaks havoc in and over our lives.

There remains within human nature the fallen crest of Adam and Eve that still desires to eat and possess the apple. The things we consume with our eyes, ears, touch, smell and taste are still believed to be good. They continue to seduce us and order the level of our commitment to God. Commitment cannot take place without surrender. Surrender cannot take place without accepting the fact that we cannot overcome the appetites of life that consume and drive us away from God without the help of God’s Holy Spirit.

If we would serve God, if we desire to commit to God, the cost is the appetite of the self. The desires of the human heart. The life that is lived outside of the light of God’s truth.

There is so much more to this scripture. Let us deny our appetites and allow God’s will to become priority in your life.

Blessings,
Pastor Gool