

SAVING SELF VERSUS DYING TO SELF

Man's Way Versus God's Way (Continued)

In the feature article of the last **Standing Firm** publication, we compared man's inability to solve the problems of life with God's detailed and complete answer for facing, dealing with, and enduring all problems of life. The last article discussed the first of the contrasts listed in the following chart:

<u>Man Says</u>	<u>God Says</u>
Search for the latest or most accepted views. Look for the latest research to determine which one you will follow in deciding how to deal with problems.	Search the Scriptures. God has His perfect ways which have not changed with time.
Save self. Think better about yourself, become comfortable with yourself, and develop your inner potential.	Die to self and follow the Lord Jesus Christ. Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus, your example, the Author and Perfector of your faith.
Get in touch with your feelings. Feel good about yourself. If you feel bad about your situations or relationships, get out of them.	Obey God's commandments as a demonstration of your love for the Lord. Regardless of how you feel, do the Word through Christ who strengthens you.
You are not responsible for your deeds. It may be that others or your heredity are hindering you from being successful in living life. Learn coping skills.	God holds all responsible for their deeds. As a believer, you are not doomed to sin. You can be an overwhelming conqueror because of the empowering of the Holy Spirit.
Concentrate on finding out what was in your past for answers to problems. It is important to analyze and understand why you have your problems.	Focus on obedience in the present, regardless of what was in your past. You may not understand the "whys" of your problems, but nothing and no one can prevent you from experiencing God's peace and joy, even in the middle of trials.
Solutions are complicated. It may take years of counseling and therapy to sort things out, and you may need to try a variety of ways to find answers.	The secret to living is simple - all of God's commands can be summarized in this: love God and love your neighbor.

In this article, we address the second of the contrasts between man's way and God's way.

Contrast #2: Saving self versus dying to self

It seems that everywhere we look, in newspaper and magazine articles, movies, TV talk shows, we are bombarded with propaganda telling us to love ourselves, to improve our self image, to raise our self esteem, assert ourselves, etc. Even from some pulpits, we are encouraged to love ourselves.

The message of the Gospels is very different. The Lord Jesus Christ tells us in *John 12:24-25*, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone; but if it

dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it; and he who hates his life in this world shall keep it to life eternal.” The Scriptures also tell us in *Luke 9:23-24*, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross [a symbol of death] daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it.

We live in an upside-down world

The world thinks of dying to self as unpleasant and mocks the life of sacrifice and humility. It should be no wonder since the world’s view of life is upside-down. Everything that God says is wise, the world says is foolish and vice versa (*I Corinthians 2:14; 3:19*). Consequently, following the world’s ideals is like walking around on your hands. Can you imagine how difficult it would be to spend your days living upside down? Just think of how difficult it would be to eat standing on your head. This seems ridiculous, but it explains why worldly wisdom leads only to sadness and unfulfillment.

In the Luke and John passages, Jesus declares to us that we are created to live in a particular way. God originally made man in His own image (*Genesis 1:27*). He made man to behave and be motivated like Him. God is love (*I John 4:8*) and out of His love He created man to share His universe. Because God is love and man was originally made in His image, the only way man can be truly fulfilled and content is when he is regenerated and loving in the same way that God loves, that is, a sacrificial giving up of oneself for the object of the love. We can see clearly why Jesus says that if our focus is on self (trying to save self), we will surely lose our lives.

Perhaps this can be illustrated by a story Jay Adams once told about an unusual train. This train became very bored traveling back and forth over the same tracks day after day. The railroad cars were complaining to each other about being restricted to two very narrow tracks. The engine compared its lot with the cows out in the meadows wandering about with such freedom. It constantly huffed and puffed (this was in the days of the steam engine) about how the trucks and vans could go in so many different directions while he was restricted to the tracks. The engine thought his life was like being in prison. One day the discontent engine decided to leave the tracks and wander through the field. How far do you think it was able to go after leaving the tracks?

The point of the story is that an locomotive engine is designed and built in such a way that it is most effective when it follows the tracks it is set upon. It can carry a tremendous load and travel very swiftly for long distances only while it remains on the tracks.

In the same way, we are created to function in the way that God designed us. He designed us so that the only way we can be completely fulfilled and effective is when we love the way God loves. That is why Jesus tells us that the whole Law and the Prophets, i.e., all of the Scriptures, can be summed up merely by loving God and others (*Matthew 22:37-40*). That is why man is most miserable when he is preoccupied with self. We are like the engine in the story seeking what we think is freedom, but what is actually slavery. We try to live life walking about upside down on our hands, when God really designed us to walk right side up on our feet.

The sad reality is that many Christians are so influenced by the world’s views that they seek happiness fruitlessly while walking around on their hands when they could be walking right side up by faith totally victorious and fulfilled. God warns us in *II Timothy 3:1-2* that in the last days, difficult times are going to come, when men will be lovers of self accompanied by all the ways they demonstrate that self-love.

If you haven’t yet experienced the true freedom of dying to self and living for the Lord, remember Jesus words, “For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? (*Luke 9:25*).”

NOTE: Much of the information in this article is taken from the *Self-Confrontation* manual and its accompanying *Instructor’s Guide*.