

Carry Your Cross

(Sermon Notes) By Warren Zehring – 11/30/2013

It came to my attention this week that there is a man in one of the larger groups within God's Church who has never heard about our Incredible Human Potential as Children of God to be literally born into the Family of God. When he recently heard that we are to be members of the "God" Family – the concept struck him as humorous and as an exaggeration. He assumed that the member who had told him that he was destined to be God – was mistaken, and that it was an overstatement.

This man has been baptized for ten years and he has **not heard** about the Plan of God to recreate Himself, or that when Jesus Christ returns, we will be changed and we will be **like He is**:

1 John 3:

2 Beloved, **now** are we the Children of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, **we shall be like Him**.

Ten years in the Church of God!!! That man should have been taught **at baptism** that when having hands laid upon him, he was receiving God's Spirit, and was at that moment a **child of God** – destined to grow spiritually and be born into the very Family of God.

A child grows up to be like their parents – that is what a child does. No one stays a child. Children grow up – that is the way God designed it.

Has this man, who never heard before what we will become in the resurrection, never had Romans 8:15 explained to him?

Romans 8:

15 For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the **Spirit of adoption**, [Spirit of **sonship**] whereby we cry, Abba [daddy], Father.

Even the King James Translators were wise enough to capitalize **Spirit** – God's Spirit – given to us.

At our conception and birth, we become the **physical** children of our **dad** – his life passes to us – we receive our dad's last name as our own. We are the children of our dad. In the exact same way at our baptism and with the laying on of hands, we become the Spiritual children of our heavenly Father – **His Spirit life passes on to us** – and we receive the Father's name (Matthew 28:19, John 17:11).

Therefore, we **are** now the children of God – the seed of God.

Galatians 4:

6 And because you are [children], God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba [daddy], Father."

How can someone be in God's Church for ten years – and not know why God has called him? He has **not** been taught!

God's Church is not a social club like so many of the churches in the world – where there are activities, friends, social and business contacts – a “feel good” place!

It is inexcusable that this man in the Church of God has not been taught, and has not learned this basic truth of our destiny.

The only time this man was taught to **fast** was on Atonement...

There is something basically and fundamentally missing.

We do not need to point accusatory fingers at the **ministry** whose job it is to teach, or at the **brethren** whose duty it is to be their brother's keeper, or at the **man** himself who must be wholly lacking in good Bible study habits.

However, we must call attention to the fact that Jesus warns us not to become complacent. Today people are not searching for God's Truth and the doctrinal answers to what the Bible teaches.

We do not teach a “Prosperity Gospel” in God's Church. God has not called us to a life of ease, pleasure, amusement and luxury. Today, people want to have fun, be successful, content and happy - with a mentality of entitlement and arrogance.

God does not intend for His Church to be kinder, gentler, fuzzy and soft in the head with syrupy love and permissive of sin. God's love according to the Commandments is able to be both tough love and truly sensitive to a person's real needs.

God's love involves the issues of personal and professional integrity according to His perfect love – and that is rare in God's Church today – that is true concern for the brethren.

Hosea 4:

6 My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge:

Brethren, do we know what is required of us by God? What does it mean to live our lives in Christ?

It is the **duty of the ministry** to teach the brethren true values and morals according to God's Word – not what is expedient or situation ethics. The brethren must be taught to know and obey God's will and do so in living Godly lives.

Do the brethren know how to be truly faithful to God in all that they do? Who teaches the brethren to provoke one another to good works? People are not being taught the **basics**.

This lackadaisical tendency we see within the overall Church of God today is a perilous trend away from the high standards we once held as the people of God.

This one man who did not learn of his incredible human potential for ten years...

This one example is indicative of the dangerous overall **letdown** in the Church that Jesus refers to as a Laodicean attitude of, "We've got it all."

Revelation 3:

17 Because thou sayest, **I am rich**, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and know not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:

Brethren, I tend to take it for granted that those who are hearing the Word of God being preached are at least somewhat well versed in the Scriptures. I think to myself, "Everyone knows that Jesus was crucified on a stake – and not on a two-piece cross which is a pagan symbol of life."

But when the brethren have not learned simple basics, do they know what Jesus meant when He said, "**carry your cross.**"

(Title from this verse:)

Matthew 16:

24 Jesus said unto His disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and **take up his cross**, and follow me.

Let me point out that it is most important that we understand what Jesus means about carrying our cross.

Luke 14:

27 And whosoever doth not **bear his cross**, and come after me, **cannot be my disciple.**

Crucifixion on a pole was reserved for only the worst criminals. The disciples did not believe that Jesus was going to be crucified. So what is this cross? Jesus tells us to follow Him in carrying it. Jesus was referring to an **instrument of death**. And Jesus says we are to take up our cross daily. How many times can you be crucified physically?

So what does it mean to take up our cross daily?

This country of America has let down and turned its back on God. It is as if our people have been given over to blindness and do not see the deadly consequences of their decision to abandon God's bountiful blessings and protection. Do we realize what that means for us as a nation?

Can the Church of God be so foolish as to thrust Jesus Christ out the door – like America has done?

Brethren, do we have the ears to hear what the Spirit has to say to the churches? Jesus clearly tells us that He is **not in** the Church as He should be!

Revelation 3:

20 Behold, I **stand at the door**, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will **come in** to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

Make no mistake about it, Brethren. God's hand is on our nation and our Church. For a moment, I would like to compare and contrast what is happening in our nation of America to what is happening in our Church.

We have always seen that they parallel one another.

Our hearts are aching for our people who have lost their way. Our nation has lost its way. We no longer remember **the course** that God led our founding fathers to establish.

The enemy has come in and destroyed our spirit. God and justice are being systematically removed from every vestige of American society. Isaiah prophesied correctly of our day when he said:

Isaiah 59:

- 4** No one calls for justice, nor any pleads for truth: they trust in vanity, and speak lies; they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity.

In the same way that our country is being "dumbed down," and forgetting the basic proper regard for our Constitution, Bill of Rights, Freedom, Law, Patriotism and Liberty,...

... our Church is also slipping away from our basic understanding that sets us apart from Protestantism.

In the same way that our country is in trouble, our Church is in a state of letdown. Are we losing the vision entirely?

As our nation once looked to God, so did the Church; and as our nation has ceased to depend on God, we must ask ourselves in the Church, "To what extent do we **look to God** as we once did?"

America surged forward in a tremendous way as soon as President George Washington called upon the nation to look to God.

It was only a little over 200 years ago, in 1789, George Washington and both Houses of Congress believed:

George Washington's 1789 Thanksgiving Day Proclamation:

WHEREAS it is the duty of all nations to **acknowledge the providence of Almighty God**, to **obey His will**, to **be grateful for His benefits**, and humbly to implore His protection and favour; and Whereas both Houses of Congress have, by their joint committee, requested me "to recommend to the people of the United States a DAY OF PUBLICK THANKSGIVING and PRAYER, to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many and signal favors of **Almighty God**, especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness:

NOW THEREFORE, I do recommend and assign THURSDAY, the TWENTY-SIXTH DAY of NOVEMBER next, to be devoted by the people of these States to the service of that great and glorious Being who is the beneficent author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be; that we may then all unite in rendering unto Him our sincere and humble thanks for His kind care and protection of the people of this country previous to their becoming a nation; for the signal and manifold mercies and the favorable interpositions of His providence in the course and conclusion of the late war; for the great degree of tranquility, union, and plenty which we have since enjoyed;— for the peaceable and rational manner in which we have been able to establish Constitutions of government for our safety and happiness, and particularly the national one now lately instituted;— for the civil and religious liberty with which we are blessed, and the means we have of acquiring and diffusing useful knowledge;— and, in general, for all the great and various favours which He has been pleased to confer upon us.

And also, that we may then unite in most humbly offering our prayers and supplications to the great **Lord and Ruler** of Nations and beseech Him to **pardon our national and other transgressions**;— to enable us all, whether in publick or private stations, to perform our several and relative duties properly and punctually; to render our National Government a blessing to all the people by constantly being a Government of wise, just, and constitutional laws, discreetly and faithfully executed and obeyed; to protect and guide all sovereigns and nations (especially such as have shewn kindness unto us); and to bless them with good governments, peace, and concord; to promote the knowledge and practice of true religion and virtue, and the increase of science among them and us; and, generally to grant unto all mankind such a degree of temporal prosperity as he alone knows to be best.

GIVEN under my hand, at the city of New-York, the third day of October, in the year of our Lord, one thousand seven hundred and eighty-nine.

Brethren, in our infancy as a nation our leaders prayed and asked, ..."our great Lord and **Ruler** of Nations..., and beseech Him to **pardon** our national and other transgressions... and to bless them with good governments, peace, and concord; to promote the knowledge and practice of true religion and virtue."

Those words of George Washington are reminiscent of Solomon's **prayer of dedication** in the newly constructed Temple of God – where he asked God for His blessings and benevolence on the repentant nation of Israel (1 Kings 8:22-61)

Only seventy-four years later, while our nation was torn by civil war, our 16th President, Abraham Lincoln expressed a similar faith in calling our country to **repent** of their even greater national sins, ...

In calling for national repentance Lincoln said:

Abraham Lincoln's Thanksgiving Proclamation October 3, 1863

The year that is drawing towards its close, has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies. To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added, which are of so extraordinary a nature, that they cannot fail to penetrate and soften even the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever watchful providence of **Almighty God**. In the midst of a civil war of unequalled magnitude and severity, which has sometimes seemed to foreign States to invite and to provoke their aggression, peace has been preserved with all nations, order has been maintained, the laws have been respected and obeyed, and harmony has prevailed everywhere except in the theatre of military conflict; while that theatre has been greatly contracted by the advancing armies and navies of the Union. Needful diversions of wealth and of strength from the fields of peaceful industry to the national defence, have not arrested the plough, the shuttle, or the ship; the axe had enlarged the borders of our settlements, and the mines, as well of iron and coal as of the precious metals, have yielded even more abundantly than heretofore. Population has steadily increased, notwithstanding the waste that has been made in the camp, the siege and the battle-field; and the country, rejoicing in the consciousness of augmented strength and vigor, is permitted to expect continuance of years, with large increase of freedom.

No human counsel hath devised nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God, who, while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy.

It has seemed to me fit and proper that they should be solemnly, reverently and gratefully acknowledged as with one heart and voice by the whole American people. I do therefore invite my fellow citizens in every part of the United States, and also those who are at sea and those who are sojourning in foreign lands, to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next, as a day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens. And I recommend to them that while offering up the ascriptions justly due to Him for such singular deliverances and blessings, they do also, **with humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience**, commend to his tender care all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners or sufferers in the lamentable civil strife in which we are unavoidably engaged, and fervently implore the interposition of the Almighty Hand to heal the wounds of the nation and to restore it as soon as may be consistent with the Divine purposes to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquility and Union.

In testimony whereof, I have hereunto set my hand, and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed.

Done at the city of Washington, this third day of October, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, and of the independence of the United States the eighty-eighth.

Brethren, President Abraham Lincoln confessed our sin and begged God's forgiveness on a perverse and disobedient people.

Again, when President Abraham Lincoln prayed, God heard the prayer. Immediately following the Civil War a great **resurgence** of **population** and **prosperity** occurred.

Can you imagine the acknowledgment of our great Creator God, and those same fervent sentiments being expressed by our President and Congress today?

How far has our nation fallen? It has now become practically inconceivable for our national leaders to bless God's name with one consent.

If our nation would return to God with the same fervor possessed by our forefathers our nation would be spared the devastation that will soon befall us:

Can you imagine our nation out of debt – and on a solid footing – with no wars being fought around the world – with no radical insurgent extremist multiplying on our shores – and no babies being killed by the millions...

Is it too much to believe?

2 Chronicles 7:

14 If my people, who are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then **will I hear** from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will **heal their land**.

Yes, God would heal our land as he has done before! Within our Church we also need to **repent** of this Laodicean attitude. We need a **resurgence** of the values and zeal we once possessed. That is why Jesus says to us:

Revelation 3:

19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: **be zealous therefore, and repent**.

A day of sorting out is about to come upon us when we least expect it.

Daniel 12:

10 Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand.

What does it mean when Jesus tells us to deny ourselves, and **take up our cross**, and follow Him?

"Take up your cross" means more than putting up with the problems that come our way: a difficult relationship, a complex job, a physical infirmity.

Matthew 16:

20 Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Messiah.

21 From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, **and be killed**, and be raised again the third day.

When Jesus said that He would be killed (not crucified) in Jerusalem – it was too much for Peter. Peter’s understanding of the Messiah was that He would set up a world ruling kingdom that would exist forever – and Peter would have a pretty good position in that world ruling kingdom. Perhaps the #2 man in all the kingdom.

So when Jesus said, “I’m going to Jerusalem and be killed,” it just went against all of Peter’s expectations.

Matthew 16:

- 22** Then Peter took [Jesus], and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.
- 23** But [Jesus] turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan [an Adversary working against what Jesus came to accomplish]: thou art an offence unto me: for you savor not the things that be of God, but those that be of men. [...Power, prestige, control, position,...]
- 24** Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and **take up his cross**, and follow me.

What could that have possibly meant to the disciples – “Take up you cross?”

Jesus was telling each and every disciple, “You are in this **to the death** – until you are executed.”

Do not think of Jesus being killed as something that Jesus **alone** went through, but something we have to go through if we are to follow Him.

Bearing our cross is the pain unto death of dealing with the things that oppose what God is doing.

So Jesus’ challenging command to his disciples to “take up their cross” scandalized and stunned them.

“**Prepare to die.**”

Some of you will remember the iconic movie, **Princess Bride** with Andre the Giant in it.

There was a character in the movie named Inigo Montoya who repeated this line many times in the movie – and he said it exactly the same way every time:

“Hello. My name is Inigo Montoya. You killed my father. **Prepare to die.**”

When Jesus told His disciples to “Take up their cross,” He was saying to them in effect, “**Prepare to die.**”

Matthew 16:

- 25** For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will **lose his life** for my sake shall find it.
- 26** For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own [life – same word as the previous verse – ‘*psuche*’]? or what shall a man give in exchange for his life?
- 27** For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works. We saw in:
- 24** ... let him **deny** himself. [even **life** itself]

"Carrying your cross" means you are on your way to your death. That is what Jesus meant. We are exploring the many ways we are told to **carry our cross**.

Everyone is familiar with the crucifix and Jesus hung on it. They are everywhere – not only on top of church buildings – but also on lots of jewelry, and in paintings.

But, as usual Satan's deception brings a misunderstanding. That image does not depict Christ's death correctly.

From E. W. Bullinger:

1. The word *stauros* in Greek; denotes an upright pole, pale or stake, to which the criminals were nailed for execution.
2. The word *xulon*, in Greek, generally denotes a piece of a dead log of wood or timber, for fuel or for any other purpose. It is not like *dendron*, which is used of a living, or green tree, as in Matthew 21:8. Revelation 7:1, 3; 8:7; 9:4, &c.

Acts 5:

30 The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a **tree**. [tree trunk or pole]

There is nothing in the Greek of the N.T. even to imply **two pieces of timber**. The Catacombs in Rome that have so many tombs of early Christians bear the same testimony:

"Jesus Christ" is **never** represented there as "hanging on a **cross**."

Not for the first four centuries do we ever find "Jesus Christ" depicted as "hanging on a **cross**." It is a purely Pagan concept – and unfortunately we are stuck with it – because it is everywhere – even in our language. We know that in the Egyptian churches the cross was a pagan symbol of life, borrowed by the Christians, and interpreted in the pagan manner. The evidence is complete, that the Lord was put to death upon an **upright stake**, and not on two pieces of timber placed at any angle.

To "take up the cross" means to willingly give one's life without reservation and follow in the steps of Jesus Christ – even to death for His sake, if necessary.

John 15:

13 No one has greater love than this, to **lay down one's life** for one's friends.

For the most part, people today are no longer ready to **repent** and change, or form new commitments at the cost of serious personal sacrifice, but rather they are caught up in selfish, self-serving and self-absorption endeavors. We all know the Scripture:

Isaiah 58:

1 Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.

That crying aloud is not only for our **nation** and the **world** – it is also to wake up our **Church**.

Who is crying aloud today – are we ashamed and embarrassed at the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

Mark 8:

38 Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.

Brethren, Time is short. Jesus said,

John 9:

4 I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.

2 Peter 3:

10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night;

1 Thessalonians 5:

2 For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.

Brethren have you ever said to yourself – now is the time to carry my cross? ...now is the time to lay my life down? This truly Christian concept should not be foreign to us.

Have you ever seen someone suffering and very sick?

Were you able to say to God, “Take me Lord in place of this poor person – let them live – and let me die in their place – and really mean it when you say it to God. Begging God – take me instead!”

Have you ever seen someone being unfairly mistreated or put out of God’s Church by a wayward minister?

You knew that it would be “suicide” to come to the aid of your abused brother or sister – and yet, you put it all on the line for them?

That is **carrying your cross** to the death.

That is the meaning of **lay down your life**,

And because those are spiritual sacrifices – we get to do them over and over:

Paul says that we can lay down our lives – and still be alive.

Romans 12:

1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

We do need to be changed/transformed to thinking like Christ – who laid down His life for us. In other words, Jesus died on the cross – it's not asking too much of us to "die daily" in fulfillment of Christ's command:

1 Corinthians 15:

31 I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, **I die daily.**

Jesus spoke of His death as a "baptism" that He and others would go through. Few realize that Jesus' death is a picture of **our own death** and burial!

Matthew 20:

22 But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able.

Mark 10:

38 But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?

Are you able to be baptized with my baptism? That is the same thing as **carry your cross.**

1 John 3:

14 *We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loves not his brother abides in death...*

1 John 3:

16 *Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He **laid down His life** for us: and we ought to **lay down our lives** for the brethren.*

Jesus laid down his life for the whole world (John 1:29).

Brethren, ask yourself, "Who have I laid my life down for?" Are we carrying our cross as Jesus gave us example?

Jesus taught, "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:12-13)

Jesus laid His life down for us, so we must lay our lives down for others.

What are some other ways we must be doing that?

When a brother or sister has strayed and allowed a serious sin to enter their life - we must serve them by going to their spiritual rescue, no matter what it takes - that is laying down our life for them.

Not only must we have an attitude of being willing to lay our life down for others, we must actively intervene in their lives whenever they go astray **so that they may live.**

We must fight for others when they are too weak to fight for themselves.

Paul said it like this:

Galatians 6:

- 1** Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.
- 2** Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

Then, Jesus adds, "As I have loved you." If we are reading closely, we would ask ourselves, how was it that Jesus loved us? "As," means in the same way. We are to love others with the exact same love that Jesus loved us. Jesus died for us – that is the way He loved us.

You might say, "Surely, Jesus does not expect us to literally be willing to die for one another" – but He does.

Romans 5:

- 7** For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.

Unless we learn to lay our lives down for the brethren, just as Jesus did for us, we will **not** have a part in the first resurrection. Paul "died" daily serving the spiritual needs of the brethren.

2 Corinthians 12:

- 15** And I will very gladly **spend** and **be spent** for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved.

After coming to appreciate Christ's fervent life of service and sacrifice, we are to take up our "cross" and imitate Christ's example of personal obedience, sacrifice and service for the good of others.

1 Peter 2:

- 21** For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should **follow his steps**: [follow in His steps to Golgotha]
- 22** Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth:
- 23** Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judges righteously: [That's God the Father]
- 24** Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the **tree**, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.
- 25** For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.

Peter was drawing from Isaiah:

Isaiah 53:

4-11 Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows... He was wounded for our transgressions... He was bruised [devastated, crushed, oppressed] for our iniquities... and with His stripes we are healed... [God the Father] has **laid on Him the iniquity of us all...** You shall make his soul an offering for sin... He shall bear their iniquities.

We in the Church of God must return unto the Lord.

Hebrews 12:

2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Revelation 3:

21 To him that overcomes will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in His throne.

End: Carry your Cross