

THE ISSUES OF GOD AND THE ISSUES OF MEN

MARK 08: 34–09: 01

Introduction

The issues of God and the issues of men differ radically. This passage shows just how much they differ, and as such it warns every man.

- I. Jesus spoke to all, to the people and to His disciples (v. 34).
- II. The issue of discipleship: indulgence vs. denying self (v. 34).
- III. The issue of life: saving life vs. losing life (v. 35).
- IV. The issue of value: gaining the world vs. saving the soul (vv. 36-37).
- V. The issue of the Messiah: being ashamed vs. confessing Christ (v. 38).
- VI. The issue of death: tasting death vs. seeing God's kingdom (v. 9:1).

I. *Mark 08:34 Warning of Jesus Christ*

Jesus spoke to all, both to the people and to His disciples. Note that Jesus “called the crowd...along with His disciples.” What He now said was a warning to the whole crowd, to the whole world.

II. *Mark 08:34 Discipleship: Indulgence vs. Denying Self*

There is the issue of discipleship, that is, indulging self vs. denying self. Jesus was very pointed: there is a life of self-indulgence and there is a life of self-denial (Rom. 12:1-2; 2 Cor. 6:17-18; 1 Jn. 2:15-16). A person has to make a choice between...

- loving comfort and ease or commitment and discipline
- loving wealth and property or work and compassion
- loving recognition and fame or humility and sacrifice
- loving position and power or service and ministry
- loving pleasure and feeling or righteousness and self-control

The question is: “How does a person go about making the right choice?” Jesus said four things.

1. A man must *will to come* after Him (See *Would*, Mk. 8:34).
 2. A man must *deny himself* (See *Deny*, Mk. 8:34).
 3. A man must *take up his cross* (See *Cross and Discipleship*, Lk. 9:23).
 4. A man must *follow Christ* (See *Follow*, Mk. 8:34).
-

MARK 08:34 WOULD (THELEI)

To desire, wish, design, purpose, resolve, determine. It is a deliberate willing, a deliberate choice, a determined resolve to follow Christ. If a person really wills and deliberately chooses to follow Christ, then he has to do the three things mentioned. Note, the choice is voluntary. It is not forced upon the person. It is the individual who wills and chooses; therefore, it is the individual who must act and do the three things mentioned. □

MARK 08:34 DENY (APARNEOMAI)

To disown, disregard, forsake, renounce, reject, refuse, restrain, disclaim, do without. It means to subdue, to disregard oneself and one's interest. Very simply, it means to say "no." But note: the call is not to say "no" to some behaviour or thing, but to *self*. A person is to *deny self*. This means much more than just being negative, that is, giving up something and doing without something.

It means that we are to act positively, to say "yes" to Christ and "no" to self. It means to let Christ rule and reign in one's heart and life, to let Christ have His way completely. Of course, if a person allows Christ to rule in his life, all negative as well as positive behaviour is taken care of. In the Greek the word is an ingressive aorist, which means the person enters a new state or condition. It means *let him at once begin* to "deny self." □

MARK 08:34 FOLLOW (AKOLOOTHEO)

To be a follower or companion, to be a disciple. It has the idea of seeking to be in union with and in the likeness of. It is following Christ, seeking to be just like Him. Again, this is not passive behaviour, but an active commitment and walk. It is energy and effort, action and work. It is going after Christ with zeal and energy, struggling and seeking to follow in His footsteps no matter the cost. Note that His steps lead to death before they lead to glory (Mt. 16:21). □

LUKE 09:23 CROSS AND DISCIPLESHIP

*Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." **Luke 09:23***

People in Jesus' day knew what it meant to "take up" a cross. They saw scores of criminals bear the cross to the place where they were to be executed, and they witnessed scores of crucifixions, some even by the side of the roads that led in and out of the cities.

The cross does not mean merely bearing one's particular hardship in life, such as poor health, abuse, unemployment, invalid parents, an unsaved spouse, a wayward child. The cross is always an instrument of death, not just an object to carry or bear. The Christian is to die mentally and actively. He is to deny himself daily. He is to let the mind of Christ, the mind of humbling himself to the point of death, be in him and fill his thoughts every day (Phil. 2:5-8; 2 Cor. 10:3-5). He is to put his will, his desires, his wants, his ambitions to death. In their stead, he is to follow Jesus and to do His will all day long. Note this is not negative, passive behaviour. It takes positive, active behaviour to *will*, to *deny self*, to *take up one's cross*, to *follow Christ*. A person has to act, work, get to it, be diligent, consistent, and enduring in order to die to self.

There are several ways the believer dies to self. Romans 6:11-13 spells out the ways as clearly as they can be.

Rom 6:11-13 *In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. (see Rom. 6:2-10)*

1. The believer reckons or counts himself crucified with Christ.

Rom 6:11a *In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin.*

Rom 6:6 *For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.*

Gal 5:24 *Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.*

Gal 2:20 *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

2. The believer reckons or counts himself dead to sin, but alive to God.

Rom 6:11 *In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.*

1 Pet 4:2 *As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.*

3. The believer does not let sin reign in his body.

Rom 6:12 *Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.*

Col 3:5 *Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.*

4. The believer does not yield the parts of his body to sin, as instruments of wickedness.

Rom 6:13a *Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness.*

Rom 8:13 *For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.*

5. The believer yields himself to God – as much as those who are alive from the dead are yielded to God.

Rom 6:13b *But rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life.*

Rom 12:1 *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship.*

Rom 13:14 *Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.*

6. The believer yields his body members as instruments of righteousness.

Rom 6:13c *And offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.*

Gal 5:16 *So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.*

It should be noted that one's hardship or burden can bring a person to the place where the Lord can deal with him. It is then that the hardship becomes the cross and denial of self that Jesus is talking about. With an act of self-denial, the Christian can then count or reckon himself alive to God (Rom. 6:13). He can then follow Jesus. This is an act which can be described as committing all that one is and has to Christ. It is an act that needs to be repeated every day (see Mt. 10:38). □

III. Mark 08:35 *The Issue of Life*

There is the issue of life, that is, saving life vs. losing life. Jesus made a very surprising statement. If a man wished to save his life, he must lose it. What did He mean? The key is found in two phrases.

1. The first phrase is: "for me." "Whoever loses his life for *me...will* save it." The person who abandons this life, who sacrifices and gives all that he is and has for Christ, will save his life. But the person who *keeps* his life, that is, what he has, and *seeks* more and more of this life will lose his life completely and eternally.

The person who "saves his life, who..."

- seeks to avoid aging, decaying and death and denies Christ, will lose his life eternally.
- seeks to make his life more and more comfortable and secure beyond what is necessary and neglects Christ, will lose his life eternally.
- seeks to gain wealth, power, and fame and who compromises Christ, will lose his life eternally.
- seeks the thrills, excitement and stimulation of this world and ignores Christ, will lose his life eternally.

As said above, the person who loses his life for Christ, who sacrifices and gives all he is and has for Christ, saves his life; and he saves it eternally. The person who keeps his life and what he has for himself will lose his life, and he loses it eternally. The call of Christ is just what He says: a life of denial that takes up the cross and follows in His steps.

Luke 12:19-20 *And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you.' Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?"*

Isa 55:2 *Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.*

Prov 10:2 *Ill-gotten treasures are of no value, but righteousness delivers from death.*

2. The second phrase is: "and the gospel's [sake]." "Whoever loses his life...for the gospel will save it." The person who abandons this life, who sacrifices and gives all he is and has for the gospel will save his life. But the person who keeps his life and all that he has and tries to keep himself and his family free from the suffering and needs of this world – that person will lose his life.

The person who saves his life...

- who lies around in the comforts of home... will lose his life.
- who spends all he has on himself and his family... will lose his life
- who takes all his time for his own affairs and desires...will lose his life.

The person who gives his life...

- who becomes an explorer and pioneer for Christ...will save his life.
- who sacrifices and gives all he is and has to the gospel...will save his life.
- who gives of his time for the gospel (visiting, teaching, sharing, witnessing, ministering)... will save his life.

Mat 19:29 *"And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life."*

Mat 25:43 *'I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'*

2 Cor 4:11 *For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body.*

Phil 1:29 *For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him.*

1 John 3:17 If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?

Zec 7:6 And when you were eating and drinking, were you not just feasting for yourselves?

IV. Mark 08:36–37 The Issue of Value

There is the issue of value, that is, gaining the world vs. saving the soul. The Greek word translated *soul* is the same Greek word translated *life*. Jesus used the word *life* in two senses. There are *two stages, two beings, two existences to the same life*: the life that exists on this earth and the life that will exist beyond this earth. Once a person (life) is born into this world, he will exist forever. It is just a matter of where he goes after life in this world: to be with God or to be apart from God.

No man can gain the whole world. But what if he could? All the pleasure and wealth and power and fame are nothing compared with his soul. There are four primary reasons why the soul is far superior to the things of this earth.

1. Everything fades and passes away. A person possesses something but for a short time...
 - A man may choose money and property instead of helping to meet the needs of the world. But money and property can be held only for a short time.
 - A man may choose position and power instead of giving his life where it would do the most good. But position and power are held only for a short time.
 - A woman may choose freedom and pleasure instead of home and family. But freedom and pleasure last only for a short time.
 - A person may choose the world and comfort instead of God and His church. But the world and comfort do not satisfy, and they last only for a short time.

1 Tim 6:7 For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.

1 Pet 1:24 For, “All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall.”

Isa 40:6 A voice says, “Cry out.” And I said, “What shall I cry?” “All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field.”

2. Everything cannot be used all at once. Every thing sits, is unused most of the time. Most of the time...

- clothes sit
- a car sits
- power goes unused
- popularity and fame are not thought of

3. The human soul is eternal; it never dies, never ceases to exist. It will live forever, either with or apart from God.

John 3:36 “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.”

John 12:25 “The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”

Gal 6:8 The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.

4. The human soul is of more value than the whole world.

Mat 16:26 “What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?”

Psa 49:12 But man, despite his riches, does not endure; he is like the beasts that perish.

V. **Mark 08:38 The Issue of the Messiah**

There is the issue of the Messiah, that is, being ashamed of Christ vs. confessing Christ. At least five things are said in this verse (See Mt. 10:32-33).

1. Christ is the true Messiah. *He and His words* determine a man’s destiny. Note the words, “Me and my words.”
2. A man can be ashamed of Christ, and some men are ashamed of Him. Some fear what others will say. They fear being ridiculed by peers: talked about, questioned, avoided, sneered at, abused, persecuted. Therefore, they deny Christ. They deny by word, act and silence.
3. The world makes it difficult to confess Christ. Why? The world is an adulterous and sinful place. And every generation passes down its adulterous and sinful behaviour. Few ever want to confess (follow) the true and living God. God’s insistence on the denial of self and the giving of all one is and has is too high a price for most persons. Most persons want to keep some control over their lives and some wealth for themselves. Most are unwilling to give all they are and

have to God (that is, to the gospel) and to the demanding love that *the needs of this desperate world require*.

4. The day of the Messiah's glory is coming, a day when His glory will be revealed to all. It will be a day of glory and splendour, of triumph and victory, a day when all will see Him as He really is: the true Messiah, the Son of the living God.
5. The day of judgment – of shame and of being ashamed – is coming. All who are ashamed of the Messiah in this world will be ashamed of their behaviour where it really counts – before God Himself. The person will see Christ's standing with God, and Christ will be ashamed of the person and of the selfish life the person has lived. And then the *ashamed person* will hear those fateful and terrifying words. "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Mt. 7:23; see Mt. 25:41-46).

Mat 7:23 "Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"

Luke 12:9 "But he who disowns me before men will be disowned before the angels of God."

Luke 13:27 "But he will reply, 'I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!'"

VI. Mark 09:01 The Issue of Death

There is the issue of death, that is, tasting death vs. seeing God's kingdom. This is not a reference to the Lord's second coming. The disciples did die before Jesus' return. More than likely it refers to the Lord's victory over death and hell which took place upon the cross and in the resurrection. It refers to the rule and reign of God's kingdom that takes place within the heart of the believer, to the rule and reign of the Holy Spirit when the Holy Spirit comes to take residence within the believer (See Mt. 16:28, Mt. 19:23-24; Jn. 8:52; Heb. 2:9).

Thought 1. A man either tastes death or sees God's kingdom with power.

- 1) Most men walk in death.

John 6:53 Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."

Eph 5:14 For it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

1 Tim 5:6 *But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives.*

Rev 3:1 *“To the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.”*

2) Some men experience the saving power of God’s kingdom (See Mt. 19:23-24).

Luke 15:32 *“But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.”*

Eph 2:1 *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins.*

Col 2:13 *When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins.*

John 8: 52 *At this the Jews exclaimed, “Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that if anyone keeps your word, he will never taste death.”*

Heb 2:9 *But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. ■*