

The Subtle Snare of Self

As you take up the subject of self with your group, you will find no better example of self-denial than that of Jesus Christ. As your students ponder Jesus' relationship with His Father, you will see that He utterly ignored self. He told His disciples, "I can of mine own self do nothing" (John 5:30). Though He was God's Son, He took the place of a servant, subjecting His will and actions entirely to His Father.

Your students know that believers are called to walk as Christ walked. They should understand that this life of complete self-renunciation—of laying down self and of choosing God's will and way over our own—is the way to a daily walk of victory.

Response 1 — Philippians 2:4 — Be aware of the concerns of others. Luke 12:22 — Don't be unduly concerned about material needs. 1 Peter 2:11 — Guard against succumbing to improper fleshly impulses or strong desires. Luke 8:14 — Don't become encumbered with the cares of life. Philippians 4:8 — Keep your mind focused on the things of God.

After your students discuss the principles brought out by these verses, you can broaden the discussion by showing how Satan places the snare of self-centeredness directly in the mainstream of our daily lives. Perhaps it slips into place as we become wrapped up in personal deadlines, demands, and duties. We might stumble into that snare in an agonizingly slow checkout line, a traffic jam on the way to work, or in a conversation with an employee who can't follow instructions. Impatience with the mistakes of others, distress when our rights are violated in some way, annoyance when things don't

Objective

The students will be able to list some of the snares of self, that Satan uses to entrap the Christian, and to explain ways that these snares can be avoided.

Key Texts

Proverbs 3:5,6; Matthew 12:1; 16:24; Luke 8:14; 9:23; 12:22; Romans 8:28; 12:1; Philippians 2:3,4; 4:8; 1 Peter 2:11; Revelation 3:17

Other Scriptures Used in This Study

1 Samuel 16:7; Job 23:10; Psalm 37:23; Philippians 2:21; 1 Peter 2:21

Suggested Verse for Memorization

But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof. — Romans 13:14

fall into place, and irritation with those whose opinions vary from ours, are signs that we are letting self become the pivot of our existence. Satan's approaches vary, but the point is to make sure your students are alert to the warning signals. Philippians 2:21 is a good supporting verse to work into your discussion.

Response 2 — Romans 8:28 brings out that God will align every circumstance into a pattern of good for His children. Other Scriptures brought up by your group might include the words of the patriarch Job, who suffered incredible loss and yet could say, "He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23:10). The Psalmist wrote, "The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD" (Psalm 37:23). We need to recognize that there is no reason to feel sorry for ourselves if we are assured that, whatever comes, God is in control and has our best interests in view.

Response 3 — Answers might include: treating others with respect, making sure we give credit where it is due, trying to view all sides of an issue objectively, considering how our actions or words would appear through the eyes of others, giving others the benefit of the doubt. As a supplementary point of discussion, ask your group to outline Christ's example. Although He was God incarnate, He walked the earth as a humble, compassionate man. Certainly He had every right to claim honor and authority, yet He took a lowly place and did not draw attention to Himself. He has given us a pattern, and we must follow in His steps. See 1 Peter 2:21.

Response 4 — Allow your students time to mention some Scriptural examples. Jonah, Saul, and David when he numbered Israel, are three possibilities of those who chose to follow their own way. Noah, Stephen, and Daniel are three who chose to follow God's way. The point to bring out is that God's ways are higher than man's ways, and what appears to be the logical way may not always be God's way. Ask your students to share examples from their own knowledge or experience, where God led in ways that seemed strange and unexplainable to man but where the outcome was obviously of Him.

Response 5 — Class discussion should bring out that if Satan can get us absorbed in pleasures and possessions, we will lose the perspective of our goal and purpose as Christians. Refer again to the warning given in 1 Peter 2:11, which indicates that fleshly lusts (strong desires for the things of this world) "war against the soul." It might be interesting to point out to your students that the Greek word for *flesh* has an ethi-

cal sense, and denotes "human nature, the earthly nature of man apart from divine influence, and therefore prone to sin and opposed to God." Human nature will pull us toward a desire for whatever seems good and for whatever we personally desire, but we must see the danger that a self-pleasing and self-choosing attitude presents—it pulls us away from self-denial.

Response 6 — Your group should be able to identify the snare as self-righteousness. That snare led to the Laodiceans' lukewarmness, and their complacency led to backsliding. Self-righteousness blinds eyes, eclipses love for others, and arouses pride in hearts. It can fracture friendships and cause intolerance. It is helpful to remember that Jesus preached His longest noted sermon to churchgoers, warning against the dangers of practicing righteousness to be seen of men. Bring out that God does not see as man sees. The external observances and religious practices, however faithfully performed, win no merit on their own in His sight. He looks on the heart. See 1 Samuel 16:7.

Response 7 — Your students should conclude that first of all, dealing with any aspect of self will require honesty. Whatever the nature of the problem, it must first be recognized and then confessed before God. We must ask His forgiveness and rely on Him for help in dealing with it. Close daily communion with God and absolute dependence on Him is vital. Victory over self will require heartfelt determination, for the self-nature is powerful. We will have to purpose to be alert and on guard against subsequent attempts of Satan, and to be continually aware of the need to focus our lives on Jesus Christ.