

QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

On May 16, 2015, we received the following comment:

[Regarding Question and Response 5/12/15] “Your answer made a lot of good points, except where you say: "The spirit's leading does not require us to exercise self-denial." Notice the "words of Jesus", as you are so fond of saying: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself." -- Mt 16:24; Mk 8:34; Lk 9:23 (NIV and many others) Based on Jesus' own words, therefore, 'exercising self-denial' is absolutely essential for entrance into, and maintaining Christian discipleship and sonship through Spirit baptism. This is confirmed by Rom 7:21-25 and 1 Cor 9:24-27. Surely you're not "promising them freedom" without moral restraint are you? (2 Pt 2:19 NAS) Agape.”

To the author, thank you for your email and for closely examining the information we publish. We see your point. Perhaps we should have stated our position another way to avoid confusion.

When we wrote that the spirit's leading does not require us to exercise self-denial, we were referring to self-denial in the sense that Jesus was at *Matthew 16:24*, *Mark 8:34* and *Luke 9:23*. Jesus said we would need to 'disown ourselves.' That means that we would let go of self-importance and pride, and humble ourselves to the teachings and ministry of the Christ instead of following our own counsel or the counsel of others on how to gain life.

We do not believe he was encouraging us to withhold bodily pleasures by doing things such as fasting, physically beating ourselves, or purposely living a life of poverty thinking those acts are pleasing or required. Even Paul's words at *1 Corinthians 9:24-27* do not carry that meaning, although there are many people who believe he was, in fact, encouraging Jesus' followers to inflict some type of bodily harm to themselves in order to be found faithful. There are whole religious orders who practice self-harm thinking it is the way to life. That is not what Jesus or Paul were saying, nor what we were saying.

What we were trying to explain is that we do not need to constantly deprive ourselves in order to please God. We are to rejoice, eat the fruits of our labor, and be shining examples of the kindly and light load. So rather than focusing on what we cannot or should not do, we encourage our brothers and sisters to focus on what they **should** do, specifically that we should display the fruits of the spirit which we said is was the highest form of self-control. Self-control continues to be important, but the method is proactive, positive and giving, rather than reactive, negative and withholding.

We in no way want to 'promise freedom without moral restraint.' We are just explaining that moral restraint should not be our goal. The goal is to do something positive – like producing the fruits of the spirit. When you are positive and proactive, you automatically avoid the works of the flesh. It is similar to our view that the congregations should not focus on sin, but rather on good works and positive actions, and thereby there is no room for sin to take hold.

If some read our response to **Question and Response 5/12/15** and concluded that we were encouraging moral abandonment, we apologize and hope this response clears up our message.

“Elaia Luchnia”
