

**Devotional Thoughts :: Ascetic Christianity ...****Ascetic Christianity ... - posted by Lordoitagain (), on: 2010/3/31 19:33**

Main Entry: ascetic

Pronunciation: \-;se-tik, a-\

Variant(s): also as-cet-i-cal \-ti-k;\

Function: adjective

Etymology: Greek asketikos, literally, laborious, from asketikos one that exercises, hermit, from askein to work, exercise

Date: 1646

1 : practicing strict self-denial as a measure of personal and especially spiritual discipline

2 : austere in appearance, manner, or attitude

Mat 17:19 Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out?

Mat 17:20 And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.

Mat 17:21 Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.

Mat 16:22 Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.

Mat 16:23 But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savouriest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.

Mat 16:24 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.

Mar 8:34 And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

Mar 8:35 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it.

Luc 9:22 Saying, The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day.

Luc 9:23 And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.

Luc 9:24 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.

Acts 1:14 These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.

Acts 12:5 Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.

2Co 6:4 But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses,

2Co 6:5 In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings;

Galatians 6:14 – But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified to me, and I unto the world.

THE OLD CROSS AND THE NEW CROSS

The old cross slew men; the new cross entertains them. The old cross condemned; the new cross amuses. The old cross destroyed confidence in the flesh; the new cross encourages it. The old cross brought tears and blood; the new cross brings laughter. The flesh, smiling and confident, preaches and sings about the cross; before that cross it bows and toward that cross it points with carefully staged histrionics - but upon that cross it will not die, and the reproach of that cross it stubbornly refuses to bear.

I well know how many smooth arguments can be marshaled in support of the new cross. Does not the new cross win converts and make many followers and so carry the advantage of numerical success? Should we not adjust ourselves to the changing times? Have we not heard the slogan "New days, new ways"? And who but someone very old and very conservative would insist upon death as appointed way to life? And who today is interested in a gloomy mysticism that would sentence its flesh to a cross and recommend self-effacing humility as a virtue actually to be practiced by modern Christians? These are the arguments, along with many more flippant still, which are brought forward to give an appearance of wisdom to the hollow and meaningless cross of popular Christianity. – A.W. Tozer

One more quote.....

"Any objection to the carryings on of our present gold-calf Christianity is met with the triumphant reply, "But we are winning them!" And winning them to what? To true discipleship? To cross-carrying? To self-denial? To separation from the world? To crucifixion of the flesh? To holy living? To nobility of character? To a despising of the world's treasures? To hard self-discipline? To love for God? To total committal to Christ? Of course the answer to all these questions is..... no." -A.W. Tozer

Heb 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.

Heb 12:3 For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.

Heb 12:4 Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.

Re: Ascetic Christianity ... - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2010/3/31 19:41

There is a difference between living a crucified life, and being an ascetic.

Colossians 2:18 Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement... 20 If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as 21 "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" 23 These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.

Confusing the crucified life for asceticism is a lie from hell. The monastic movement perfected this lie to a tee in the middle ages. But as Paul tells us, the ascetic life is of NO VALUE against the flesh.

Re: - posted by ChrisJD (), on: 2010/3/31 20:36

Quote:

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The cloistered life is not presented in the Bible as the way to do this either(1Co 5:10). It is significant that the group that may have practiced those things during the New Testament time(the ascenes)(EDIT: I think that should be essenes, not ascenes!) are not anywhere to be heard of in the New Testament?

Paul said that he died daily, and that, while working with his hands, knowing how to be abased and to abound, being hungry and being full, abounding, and suffering need, having learned he said, that in whatever state he was in, to therewith be content.

Re: Ascetic Christianity ... - posted by Lordoitagain (), on: 2010/4/1 7:47

When did conquering the appetites of the flesh become a motive for self denial? The flesh is supposed to be DEAD & anything that is dead no longer has an appetite.

OF COURSE if a person's motive for strict self denial is to do the work that ONLY Christ can do, the admonition of Paul to the Colossians is very much fitting & needed.

If we are crucified with Christ & our old man is dead, our motive for strict self denial should be not for ourselves but FOR OTHERS! As Christ went to the cross FOR OTHERS, we should be so disturbed about the destruction that we see around us that we CANNOT take our normal 'rights' to food & sleep & such, but like Paul (the writer of Colossians) we find ourselves in watchings & fastings often.

Re: - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2010/4/1 7:55

"Strict self denial" in the form of asceticism is something that is NEVER encouraged in Scripture. It is never something that the Lord or His apostles ever encouraged or practiced. There may be special seasons whereby the Spirit calls one to enter into a prolonged fast and time of prayer. But, strict self denial as a way of life for all Christians, at all times, everywhere, is not a paradigm for Christian living. There may be exceptions to such on an individual basis. But, by in large, such is not the normal Christian life.

We must live disciplined lives no doubt. Lives where we deny ourselves. But we are not called to be Methodists.

Re: - posted by enid, on: 2010/4/1 11:46

KingJimmy,

Methodists?

Was that wise?

Re: - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2010/4/1 12:36

I'm using them in a hyperbolic sense. If there was ever an ascetic movement within Protestant/Evangelical Christianity, it would've been the original group of Methodists. And don't get me wrong... I LOVE them, and John Wesley. I have his complete works on my bookshelf.

But even in that, as great as the early Methodists were... it had a trace of flesh mixed in it with its rather extreme rigors. In some ways, they were ascetic in their practices.

True Christianity, is not found in ascetic practices used to mortify the flesh. Rather, it is the Spirit filled life which causes one to do that. As Paul said, if we live by the Spirit, we will put to death the deeds of the flesh. What ascetics don't get, is that you don't put to death the deeds of the flesh through fasting, praying, giving, or losing sleep. Spirit filled living may cause one to do those things, and do them rather frequently. But they in themselves are not the cure.

As even Ravenhill pointed out, monks joined abbys, and were still filled with as much lust as they were when they went in as when they came out.

Re: - posted by osandoval, on: 2010/4/1 13:04

This is a good and interesting topic. I think its another issue that comes down to proper perspectives and motives, as well as proper balance.

On the one hand you can go to the extreme of practicing and promoting a rigorous ascetic lifestyle as a means to spirituality, without the proper focus on Christ and His grace, which is unhealthy.

On the other hand you can go to the extreme of forsaking almost all thoughts of self-denial and self-discipline, and justifying our lack thereof, which is also unhealthy.

I think for the most part most of Christendom has gone to the second extreme more than the first. We have been justifying our lazy apathy and idolatry(sports,tv,hobbies,movies,careers,greed,pride,etc.). A good dose of self-denial and spiritual self-discipline would do many of us, including myself, a great deal of good.

I'll be the first to admit that I'm guilty and God has been dealing with me in this area. By His grace and strength certain idols, such as sports, have been dropping in my walk with Him. May we all continue to forsake all of our idols and truly take up our cross daily to follow the Lamb wherever He leads.

Re: - posted by Koheleth, on: 2010/4/1 21:07

Quote:

-----We must live disciplined lives no doubt. Lives where we deny ourselves. But we are not called to be Methodists.

No one seems to be able to let this spirit die. Even an originally neutral thread on sermonindex can no longer be enjoyed. Every sort of person finds it necessary to put in a jab against any name or group that he or she does not personally appreciate or like.

Methodists. How unbiblical were they? List their heresies. Or rather not. I think heaven will bear the record well enough, and we can save each other the prattle for now.

I would say, though, that all would do well to obtain and read the book "How the Methodists Saved America" by Mike Atip and would do well to note what is (and is not) demonstrated by the Methodists.

Re: - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2010/4/1 21:22

It should be noted (again) I am not taking a jab at Methodists. I am and will always be a big fan of John Wesley, and the work he did. So, please don't interpret my comment in a way other than the symbolic sense in which I hoped it to be meant. I could have just very well used the German Pietists, or Jewish Essenes. I picked the Methodists, because well, most people on here know a bit about their history.

Re: - posted by Koheleth, on: 2010/4/1 23:34

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King Jimmy,

It doesn't make any sense to me that you feel the need to pick names. Even if I understand your point, which I am not sure I do, why not use terms and language as Jesus did. Yes, he denounced the Pharisees and called them sons of hell. Are the Methodists sons of hell? The Essenes lived in Jesus' day, so it looks like in choosing them for an object lesson you are ready to put down those who Jesus would not.

I realize I am perhaps disproportionately taking you to task over this, but my goal is not entirely your specific post, but the ongoing and never-ending practice of this error among many. You said your use was intended to be symbolic. Why nail individuals and groups when so much symbolic and descriptive spiritual language is available?

We can rightly use the term Pharisee, because Jesus was clear on this. And "lawyer" or "scribe". And I think most of us would agree that we can warn against popery or looking to the Pope, because the position is anti-Christian. The same for Mormonism and probably also monks (who would have a hard time fulfilling the great commission). But Methodists?

The way you speak, it is a bad thing to be a Methodist. If you want to make that point, I suggest you attach a given timeframe, because the Methodists of old were people of God. That should help us, as you say, with the history. For the record, I am not and have never been associated with any form of Methodism.

Re: - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2010/4/1 23:59

Thanks for your concern. I'm simply saying that God has not called us to be Methodists. That is, He's not called us to the strict border-line ascetic lifestyle that early Methodists had adopted, for which Wesley wished he had made stricter. I'm not intending this as a slur against Methodism in anyway. I'm just saying, God has not called us to be Methodists :-)

I picked "Methodists" perhaps a little bit for shock value. If I said Pharisees, Essenes, whomever, it doesn't quite hit home or speak as loudly. It can be glossed over. Methodist... that'll make you think, as Methodism is something that has existed in our own back yards. It's contextualized in that sense.

Re: - posted by osandoval, on: 2010/4/2 0:21

KingJimmy, I love the works and testimony of John Wesley and early Methodism, but I understand where you are coming from and do not believe you did anything wrong in your statement. I think we need to be careful not to idolize any particular denomination. It should sadden us that denominations/divisions ever came into fruition in the first place. The Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists, Pentecostals, etc. should have never named themselves as such, but simply as the Church of Jesus Christ. Someone says, "what about the need for separating one's group from cults who call themselves "the Church of Jesus Christ, like the Mormons"? What did the early Church do? They too had many false teachers among them who claimed to be part of the Church. But they still simply called their particular group "the Church in such city, at such's home". They were all connected.