

Navy Commander J.P. Wilkins and crew were working feverishly to repair a plane in time for an important flight. They held their breath while Wilkins conducted the final inspection. As he reached behind an equipment box, he skewered his finger on the exposed end of a safety wire. The cut bled profusely. Sticking his head out of the plane to ask for a first-aid kit, he noticed two crew members studying a small red pool beneath the aircraft. "That's my blood!" he called out. Two faces brightened. "What a relief," one said. "We thought it was the hydraulic fluid!" (Dynamic Preaching XXIV, #3, p. 53)

Following Jesus Christ, we hear today, is not a matter of hydraulic fluid, but a matter of blood. Following Jesus is the ultimate joy, but the way, and part of the package, is suffering and crosses and stubborn non-conformity to easy accommodations. Following Jesus means living God, preferring God, obeying and conforming to God above all else, even yourself.

This is a little different from the common wisdom. Whitney Houston sings that "the greatest love of all" is to love yourself. Walt Whitman, arguably the greatest American poet, wrote 150 years ago (In Song of Myself) I celebrate myself, and sing myself ... I breathe the fragrance myself and know it and love it ... I dote on myself; there is that lot of me and all so luscious ... Nothing, not God, is greater to one than one's self is ... Nor do I understand who there can be more wonderful than myself." (Dynamic Preaching XXIV, #3, p. 53)

I wouldn't want either of these marrying into my family. I see sad days ahead for a husband or wife who loves herself more than a spouse or children or God.

Christianity is not against self-love. God loves us so much he gave his only Son. We should love ourselves. It's a sin not to love and cherish ourselves. It's just that there's a certain part of the self that only comes into existence when you love something / someone more than you.

Jesus love and respected himself. But he loved his Father more. He knew this might involve a cross from people who couldn't stand his non-conformity with them. He was just as certain it would involve resurrection.

I asked around last week if anyone had ever conformed to the present age (as St. Paul calls it) instead of to God first, and what was the result.

Examples. On a visit with friends down south, I told them I needed to go to Sunday evening Mass. But we were all having this great time, and I could tell they were hoping I'd just forget it. So I did ... and we had a good time ... and I'm not a complete prude about Mass ... but later I realized I'd blown a chance to show how important God was, because of a little peer pressure. I felt less rather than more.

I was recently married, working with a lot of single gals who were always on my back to go out drinking with them. I didn't really want to, but my husband said it was alright,

and finally I just gave in because I didn't want to be a fuddy duddy. After some really silly drinking, out came these Chippendale male strippers. I felt so foolish.

At my Ivy League college almost all the young people bought into liberal values about the sanctity of choice, and that the pro-life movement was ignorant, old-fashioned, unenlightened and medieval. I went along with peer pressure for awhile, but eventually the conviction that the unborn life inside a woman was a human baby was so strong I couldn't keep being deaf to my own conscience. But I had to put up with a lot of guff for this opinion, I can tell you.

I hope you and I can have enough love for God to become non-conformists. I hope we can be such passionate, ecstatic people that we're capable of falling so in love with some other, and especially with God, the ultimate other, that we can deny ourselves whenever that's what it takes to give a resounding yes to that which is beyond us Strange: the best way you can love yourself is to love God more. Losing yourself for God means winning a better self than you could ever create on your own.