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The Crutch of Self Doy Moyer

We sometimes hear unbelievers argue that religion is a crutch (something on which we heavily rely) or that we believe in God and the Bible because it just makes us feel good and thereby gives a hope that is, to them, false. We are told that we believe because it's what we want to believe, and we then fall back on that crutch to give us some stability instead of relying on self. To be fair, we should acknowledge that we heavily rely on our belief structure. However, this is true of everyone, for all rely heavily on something for support. All have beliefs they fall back on to find some kind of foundation. Whether it be religion, philosophy, or self, we all lean on what we believe and practice to find meaning, purpose, and values in life. For Christians, however, "crutch" isn't the right term for this. Relying on God is not a crutch in times of need, but rather it is a full-featured support structure for all that we are and do. To call it a crutch (like a stick on which to lean when we are hurt) is to miss the point of what it is and make it appear weak and flimsy, easily kicked out from under us. We don't merely lean on God; we stand firm on Him as our foundation, live in Him, and are grounded in Him. The Lord is not a crutch, but a Rock, a foundation on whom our entire lives are built (cf. Matthew 7:24-27). The Psalmist put it this way:

*The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer,
my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge,
my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. (Psalm 18:2)*

Believing in God as our Rock means that we are not just doing what we like as some sort of selfish power move. We are to relinquish selfish power. Christians do not, or should not, hold to religion just because it's just what we want to believe. Indeed, there are some things we believe that most would probably rather not (just because you don't like something doesn't make it false). Personally, there are a few matters that I sometimes wish I didn't feel compelled to accept. Think, for example, about Jesus' statement of discipleship: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses

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or forfeits himself?” (Luke 9:23-25, ESV) This is genuinely hard and, frankly, not fun. Taking up a cross means taking up suffering for His cause, and it is often here where people turn from Christ. Recall that even Jesus, as He was about to go to the cross, was doing something He didn't like. He despised the shame of it (Hebrews 12:2-3).

The “I” part of me doesn't like self-denial because I keep getting in my own way of the following Christ. This passage, along with a host of others, is a moratorium against selfish desires and doing my own thing. I fight that. I don't want to give up self, and it is no crutch to do so. Contrarily, the crutch is when I affirm self and do whatever I want. Giving up self is uncomfortable, hard, and vulnerable, so I fall back on self, the real crutch that is easily kicked out from under me and leaves me without a solid foundation. Yet even knowing that, seeking my own desires is what gives immediate pleasure and makes me feel good in the moment. The crutch is not God (the Rock); the crutch is self, and I am frail.

Though the temptation to rely on self is strong, I am compelled to accept that Jesus is Lord, and in doing so I must let go of self, deny self, to affirm Him. In a world that stands so much against Him, that is not something that lends itself to immediate pleasure or fulfillment of selfish purposes. Yet this is the crossroads at which all Christians stand. We either deny self and affirm Him or we affirm self and deny Him. Jesus continued:

“For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels” (Luke 9:24-26).

The trust that this takes is great, for we must look beyond what we see to what we don't see (2 Corinthians 4:16-18). The pressure of this world makes it easier to be ashamed of Christ, but if we are convinced He is Lord, then we know that the real shame is the failure to deny self. Self is the crutch. God is the Rock. We need to choose which one we will serve.