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## SELF-DENIAL

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# SELF-DENIAL DEFINED

Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635-1711)

**S**ELF-DENIAL is a Christian virtue, granted by God to His children, whereby they, out of love for God's will, neither give heed nor yield to their intellect, will, and inclinations insofar as they are in opposition to the will of God—and oppose and suppress them instead. They do so by a voluntary forsaking and rejection of all that pertains to their natural well-being, if God's cause demands such from them. This [is] to the honor of God and the welfare of their neighbors.

**Self-denial is, first, a *Christian virtue*.** Pagans have observed that their inner peace has been disturbed by their lusts. Some therefore sought to extinguish them by way of reason and appeared to practice self-denial regarding some things. However, it did not issue forth from the right motive—*love for the will of God*. They did not have the right objective in view, but rather it was a seeking of *self* (be it in a different manner from others), resting in this as their peace and seeking to be honored by men. Their self-denial was thus a splendid sin that had a counterfeit luster and was not accompanied by deeds.

Our reference here, however, is to the self-denial of a *Christian* as being exclusive of all inordinate<sup>1</sup> self-love (and self-reliance that issues forth from this) and seeking of self. Such self-denial issues forth from love for the will of God and culminates in the glorification of God.

**Secondly, the moving cause of self-denial is *the Lord and not man himself*.** Man is too deeply immersed in self-love to be able to rid himself from it. Even if he could divorce himself from this, he would not be able to bring himself into the opposite virtuous disposition. Self-denial does not consist in a negation, but is rather a propensity.<sup>2</sup> The Lord grants this grace to His children, for He grants them spiritual life in regeneration (Eph 2:1; Jam 1:18). Through this virtuous disposition, He causes them to be active and thus works in them to will and to do (Phi 2:13). He particularly works in them the mortification<sup>3</sup> of sin: "...but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live" (Rom 8:13). God, having given life in the soul, stirs up this life and renders it active by His prevenient<sup>4</sup> and cooperative power. The believer—uniting himself by faith with Christ and through Christ with God—takes hold of His strength as his own. By reason of this received strength, [he] is active in mortifying sin within him. God is thus the original cause: man, having been affected by this power, is himself active in the casting out of sinful self-love and its consequences, as well as in purifying and adorning himself with the contrary virtue. "Let us cleanse ourselves" (2Co 7:1); "...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which work-eth in you both to will and to do of *his* good pleasure" (Phi 2:12-13).

**Thirdly, the subjects of self-denial are *the children of God*.** The unconverted are void of all spiritual life; therefore, the motions and operation of life cannot come forth from them. Rather, it is a gift to God's children as presently being in a converted and believing state. They are those who are Christ's disciples and follow Him (Mat 16:24). Self-denial does not consist in a few deeds, but is rather a propensity and disposition of the heart. Their heart has been turned away from self-love and a seeking of self—albeit imperfectly...Once this virtue has become deeply rooted, the person who practices self-denial will have much inner peace. He will not so readily be enticed to entertain ulterior motives<sup>5</sup> or be envious, wrathful, and guilty of misuse of words—all of which frequently issue forth in a rash manner due to self-love and a seeking of self...All that he does renders him pleasant to all—before God and before men.

**Fourthly, the object of self-denial is *man himself*.** God has created self-love in man and mandates the exercise of this love in the Second Table of the Law by giving command that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves (Mat 22:39). After the fall, however, love has become entirely distorted, as it causes man to be opposed to God, to make

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<sup>1</sup> **inordinate** – excessive.

<sup>2</sup> **propensity** – quality of being inclined to something.

<sup>3</sup> **mortification** – putting to death. See FGB 201, *Mortification*, from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>4</sup> **prevenient** – acting before; that is, God's power acts in the human soul first.

<sup>5</sup> **ulterior motives** – secret, selfish reasons for doing something.

himself as God, and wanting all to end in man. This principle governs fallen man in his operations, and he wants everyone to function toward him in harmony with this principle.

From *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, Vol. 3, reprinted by  
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**Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635-1711):** Dutch theologian and representative of the Dutch Further Reformation; born in Leeuwarden, the Netherlands.



# WHAT IT COSTS TO BE A CHRISTIAN

J. C. Ryle (1816-1900)

*“For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and count-eth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?”—Luke 14:28*

**W**E are living in strange times. Events are hurrying on with singular rapidity. We never know “what a day may bring forth” (Pro 27:1). How much less do we know what may happen in a year! We live in a day of great religious profession. Scores of professing Christians in every part of the land are expressing a desire for more holiness and a higher degree of spiritual life. Yet nothing is more common than to see people receiving the Word with joy, and then after two or three years falling away and going back to their sins. They had not considered “what it costs” to be a really consistent believer and holy Christian. Surely, these are times when we ought often to sit down and “count the cost,” and to consider the state of our souls. We must mind what we are about. If we desire to be truly holy, it is a good sign. We may thank God for putting the desire into our hearts. Still, the cost ought to be counted. No doubt, Christ’s way to eternal life is a way of pleasantness. But it is folly to shut our eyes to the fact that His way is narrow, and the cross comes before the crown.

**I have, first, to show *what it costs to be a true Christian.*** Let there be no mistake about my meaning. I am not examining what it costs to save a Christian’s soul. I know well that it costs nothing less than the blood of the Son of God to provide atonement and to redeem man from hell. The price paid for our redemption was nothing less than the death of Jesus Christ on Calvary. We “are bought with a price” (1Co 6:20). “Who gave himself a ransom for all” (1Ti 2:6). But all this is wide of the question. The point I want to consider is another one altogether. It is what a man must be *ready to give up* if he wishes to be saved. It is the amount of sacrifice a man must submit to if he intends to serve Christ. It is in this sense that I raise the question, “What does it cost?” And I believe firmly that it is a most important one.

I grant freely that it costs little to be a *mere outward Christian*. A man only has to attend a place of worship twice on Sunday and to be tolerably moral during the week, and he has gone as far as thousands around him ever go in religion. All this is cheap and easy work: it entails no self-denial or self-sacrifice. If this is saving Christianity and will take us to heaven when we die, we must alter the description of the way of life and write, “Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to heaven!”

But it *does* cost something to be a real Christian, according to the standard of the Bible. There are enemies to be overcome, battles to be fought, sacrifices to be made, an Egypt to be forsaken, a wilderness to be passed through, a cross to be carried, a race to be run. Conversion<sup>6</sup> is not putting a man in an armchair and taking him easily to heaven. It is the beginning of a mighty conflict in which it costs much to win the victory. Hence arises the unspeakable importance of “counting the cost.”

**Let me try to show precisely and particularly what it costs to be a true Christian.** Let us suppose that a man is disposed to take service with Christ and feels drawn and inclined to follow Him. Let us suppose that some affliction, some sudden death, or an awakening sermon has stirred his conscience, made him feel the value of his soul,

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<sup>6</sup> See FGB 195, *Conversion*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

and desire to be a true Christian. No doubt, there is everything to encourage him. His sins may be freely forgiven, however many and great. His heart may be completely changed, however cold and hard. Christ and the Holy Spirit, mercy and grace, are all ready for him. Still, he should count the cost. Let us see particularly, one by one, the things that his religion will cost him.

**(1) For one thing, it will cost him *his self-righteousness*.** He must cast away all pride and high thoughts and conceit of his own goodness. He must be content to go to heaven as a poor sinner saved only by free grace and owing all to the merit and righteousness of another. He must really feel as well as say the Prayer-book words—that he has “erred and gone astray like a lost sheep,” that he has “left undone the things he ought to have done, and done the things he ought not to have done, and that there is no health in him.” He must be willing to give up all trust in his own morality, respectability, praying, Bible-reading, church going, and sacrament receiving, and to trust in nothing but Jesus Christ.

Now this sounds hard to some. I do not wonder...Let us set down this item first and foremost in our account. To be a true Christian, it will cost a man his self-righteousness.

**(2) For another thing, it will cost a man *his sins*.** He must be willing to give up every habit and practice that is wrong in God’s sight. He must set his face against it, quarrel with it, break off from it, fight with it, crucify it, and labor to keep it under, whatever the world around him may say or think. He must do this honestly and fairly. There must be no separate truce with any special sin that he loves. He must count *all* sins as his deadly enemies and hate *every* false way. Whether little or great, whether open or secret, all his sins must be thoroughly renounced. They may struggle hard with him every day and sometimes almost get the mastery over him. But he must never give way to them. He must keep up a perpetual war with his sins. It is written, “Cast away from you all your transgressions” (Eze 18:31); “Break off thy sins...and thine iniquities” (Dan 4:27); “Cease to do evil” (Isa 1:16).

This also sounds hard. I do not wonder. Our sins are often as dear to us as our children are—we love them, hug them, cleave to them, and delight in them. To part with them is as hard as cutting off a right hand or plucking out a right eye. But it must be done. The parting must come. “Though wickedness be sweet in his mouth, *though* he hide it under his tongue; *Though* he spare it, and forsake it not; but keep it still within his mouth” (Job 20:12-13). He and sin must quarrel if he and God are to be friends. Christ is willing to receive any sinners. But He will not receive them if they will stick to their sins. Let us set down that item second in our account. To be a Christian, it will cost a man his sins.

**(3) For another thing, it will cost a man *his love of ease*.** He must take pains and trouble if he means to run a successful race towards heaven. He must daily watch and stand on his guard like a soldier on enemy ground. He must take heed to his behavior every hour of the day, in every company, and in every place—in public as well as in private, among strangers as well as at home. He must be careful over his time, his tongue, his temper, his thoughts, his imagination, his motives, his conduct in every relation of life. He must be diligent about his prayers, his Bible-reading, and his use of Sundays with all their means of grace. In attending to these things, he may come far short of perfection; but there is none of them that he can safely neglect. “The soul of the sluggard desireth, and *hath* nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat” (Pro 13:4).

This also sounds hard. There is nothing we naturally dislike so much as “trouble” about our religion. We hate trouble...Anything that requires exertion and labor is entirely against the grain of our hearts. But the soul can have “no gains without pains.” Let us set down that item third in our account. To be a Christian, it will cost a man his love of ease.

**(4) In the last place, it will cost a man *the favor of the world*.** He must be content to be thought ill of by man if he pleases God. He must count it no strange thing to be mocked, ridiculed, slandered, persecuted, and even hated. He must not be surprised to find his opinions and practices in religion despised and held up to scorn. He must submit to be thought by many a fool, an enthusiast,<sup>7</sup> and a fanatic—to have his words perverted and his actions misrepresented. In fact, he must not marvel if some call him mad. The Master says, “Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also” (Joh 15:20).

I dare say this also sounds hard. We naturally dislike unjust dealing and false charges, and [we] think it very hard to be accused without cause. We should not be flesh and blood if we did not wish to have the good opinion of our neighbors. It is always unpleasant to be spoken against, forsaken, lied about, and to stand alone. But there is no help for it. The cup that our Master drank must be drunk by His disciples. They must be “despised and reject-

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<sup>7</sup> **enthusiast** – one who erroneously believes he is the recipient of divine communications.

ed of men” (Isa 53:3). Let us set down that item last in our account. To be a Christian, it will cost a man the favor of the world.

Such is the account of what it costs to be a true Christian. I grant the list is a heavy one. But where is the item that could be removed? Bold indeed must that man be who would dare to say that we may keep our self-righteousness, our sins, our laziness, and our love of the world, and yet be saved!

I grant it costs much to be a true Christian. But who in his sound senses can doubt that it is worth any cost to have the soul saved?...Surely, a Christian should be willing to give up anything that stands between him and heaven. A religion that costs nothing is worth nothing! A cheap Christianity without a cross will prove in the end a useless Christianity without a crown.

From *Holiness*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

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J. C. Ryle (1816-1900): Bishop of the Anglican Church; born at Macclesfield, Cheshire County, England.



## CROSS-BEARING

Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

*“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.”—Matthew 16:24*

**T**HE word *will* here means “desire to” just as in that verse, “all that will live godly” (2Ti 3:12). It signifies “determine to.” “If any man will [or desires] to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross [not *a* cross, but *his* cross], and follow me.” Then in Luke 14:27, Christ declared, “And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.” So it is not optional. The Christian life is far more than subscribing to a system of truth or adopting a code of conduct or of submitting to religious ordinances. Preeminently, the Christian life is a person: experience of fellowship with the Lord Jesus. Just in proportion as your life is lived in communion with Christ, to that extent are you living the Christian life, and to that extent only.

**The Christian life is a life that consists of following Jesus.** “If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” O that you and I may gain distinction for the closeness of our walk to Christ, and then shall we be “close communionists” indeed. There is a class described in Scripture of whom it is said, “These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth” (Rev 14:4). But sad to say, there is another class, and a large class, who seem to follow the Lord fitfully, spasmodically,<sup>8</sup> half-heartedly, occasionally, distantly. There is much of the world and much of self in their lives, and so little of Christ. Thrice happy shall he be who like Caleb followeth the Lord fully.

Now, beloved, our chief business and aim is to follow Christ, but there are difficulties in the way. There are obstacles in the path, and it is to them that the first part of our text refers. You notice that the words *follow me* come at the end. Self, self stands in the way, and the world with its ten thousand attractions and distractions is an obstacle. Therefore, Christ says, “If any *man* will come after me—(first) let him deny himself, (second) take up his cross, (third) and follow me.” There we learn the reason why so few professing Christians are following Him closely, manifestly, consistently.

**The first step toward a daily following of Christ is the denying of self.** There is a vast difference, brethren and sisters, between denying self and so-called self-denial. The popular idea that obtains both in the world and among Christians is that of giving up things that we like. There is a great diversity of opinion as to what should be given up. There are some who would restrict it to that which is characteristically worldly, such as theater going, danc-

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<sup>8</sup> *spasmodically* – irregularly.

ing, and the racecourse. There are others who would restrict it to a certain season when amusements and other things that are followed during the remainder of the year are rigidly eschewed<sup>9</sup> at that time.

But such methods as those only foster spiritual pride: “Surely I deserve some credit if I give up so much.” My friends, what Christ speaks of in our text (and O may the Spirit of God apply it to our souls this morning) as the first step toward following Him is the denial of self itself, not simply some of the things that are pleasing to self. Not some of the things after which self hankers, but the denying of self *itself*.

What does that mean—“If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself”? It means in the first place, abandoning his own righteousness; but it means far more than that. That is only its first meaning. It means refusing to rest upon my own wisdom. It means far more than that. It means ceasing to insist upon my own rights. It means repudiating self itself. It means ceasing to consider our own comforts, our own ease, our own pleasure, our own aggrandizement,<sup>10</sup> our own benefits. It means being done with self. It means, beloved, saying with the apostle, “For me to live is, not self, but Christ. For me to live is to obey Christ, to serve Christ, to honor Christ, to spend myself for Him.” That is what it means. And “if any *man* will come after me,” says our Master, “let him deny himself,” let self be repudiated, be done with. In other words, it is what you have in Romans 12:1, “Present your bodies a living sacrifice...unto God.”

**Now the second step toward following Christ is the taking up of the cross.** “If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” Ah, my friends, to live out the Christian life is something more than a passive luxury: it is a serious undertaking. It is a life that has to be disciplined in sacrifice. The life of discipleship begins with self-renunciation, and it continues by self-mortification. In other words, our text refers to the cross not simply as an object of faith, but as a principle of life, as the badge of discipleship, as an experience in the soul. And, listen! Just as it was true that the only way to the Father’s throne for Jesus of Nazareth was by the cross, so the only way for a life of communion with God and the crown at the end for the Christian is via the cross. The legal benefits of Christ’s sacrifice are secured by faith when the guilt of sin is cancelled, but *the cross only becomes efficacious*<sup>11</sup> *over the power of indwelling sin as it is realized in our daily lives.*

I want to call your attention to the context. Turn with me for a moment to Matthew 16, verse 21: “From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.<sup>22</sup> Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him” (16:21-22). He was staggered and said, “Pity Thyself, Lord.” That expressed the policy of the world. That is the sum of the world’s philosophy—self-shielding and self-seeking. But that which Christ preached was not spare, but “sacrifice.” The Lord Jesus saw in Peter’s suggestion a temptation from Satan, and He flung it from Him. Then He turned to His disciples and said, “If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” In other words, what Christ said was this: “I am going up to Jerusalem to the cross: if anyone would be My follower, there is a cross for him.” And, as Luke 14:27 says, “Whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.” Not only must Jesus go up to Jerusalem and be killed, but everyone who comes after Him must take up his cross. The “must” is as imperative in the one case as in the other. Mediatorially,<sup>12</sup> the cross of Christ stands alone, but experimentally,<sup>13</sup> it is shared by all who enter into life.

**Now then, what does “the cross” stand for?** What did Christ mean when He said that except a man take up his cross? My friends, it is deplorable that at this late date such a question needs to be asked, and it is more deplorable still that the vast majority of God’s own people have such unscriptural conceptions of what the “cross” stands for. The average Christian seems to regard the cross in this text as any trial or trouble that may be laid upon him. Whatsoever comes up that disturbs our peace, that is displeasing to the flesh, that irritates our temper is looked upon as a cross. One says, “Well, that is my cross,” and another says, “Well, this is my cross,” and someone else says something else is his cross. My friends, the word is never so used in the New Testament.

The word *cross* is never found in the plural number, nor is it ever found with the indefinite article before it—“a cross.” Note also that in our text the cross is linked to a verb in the active voice and not the passive. It is not a cross that is laid upon us, but a cross that must be “taken up”! The cross stands for definite realities that embody and express the leading characteristics of Christ’s agony.

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<sup>9</sup> **eschewed** – avoided.

<sup>10</sup> **aggrandizement** – increase the power, status, wealth of.

<sup>11</sup> **efficacious** – successful in producing the intended result.

<sup>12</sup> **mediatorially** – referring to Christ as the one Mediator, the go-between—Prophet, Priest, and King—between God and man. See FGB 183, *Christ the Mediator*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>13</sup> **experimentally** – based on experience; experientially.

Others understand the “cross” to refer to disagreeable duties that they reluctantly discharge or to fleshly habits that they grudgingly deny. They imagine that they are cross bearing when, prodded at the point of conscience, they abstain from things earnestly desired. Such people invariably turn their cross into a weapon with which to assail other people. They parade their self-denial and go around insisting that others should follow them. Such conceptions of the cross are as Pharisaical as [they are] false and as mischievous as they are erroneous.

Now, as the Lord enables me, let me point out three things that the cross stands for. First, *the cross is the expression of the world’s hatred*. The world hated the Christ of God, and its hatred was ultimately manifested by crucifying Him. In the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter of John, seven times over Christ refers to the hatred of the world against Himself and against His people; and just in proportion as you and I are following Christ, just in proportion as our lives are being lived as His life was lived, just in proportion as we have come out from the world and are in fellowship with Him, so will the world hate us.

We read in the Gospels that one man came and presented himself to Christ for discipleship, and he requested that he might first go and bury his father—a very natural request, a very praiseworthy one surely (?), and the Lord’s reply is almost staggering. He said to that man, “Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead” (Mat 8:22). What would have happened to that young man if he had obeyed Christ? I do not know whether he did or not; but if he did, what would happen? What would his kinsfolk and his neighbors think of him? Would they be able to appreciate the motive, the devotion that caused him to follow Christ and neglect what the world would call a filial duty? Ah, my friends, if you are following Christ the world will think you are mad, and some natures and dispositions find it very hard to bear reflections on their sanity. Yes, there are some who find the reproaches of the living a harder trial than the loss of the dead.

Another young man presented himself to Christ for discipleship, and he requested the Lord that he might first be allowed to go home and say farewell to his friends—a very natural request, surely—and the Lord presented to him the cross: “No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luk 9:62). Affectionate natures find the wrench of home ties hard to bear. Harder still are the suspicions of loved ones and friends for having been slighted. Yes, the reproach of the world becomes very real if we are following Christ closely. No man can keep in with the world and follow Him.

Another young man came and presented himself to Christ and fell at His feet and worshipped Him, and said, “Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?” and the Lord presented to him the cross (Mat 19:16). “Go *and* sell that thou hast, and give to the poor...and come *and* follow me” (19:21). And the young man went away sorrowful. And Christ is still saying to you and to me this morning, “Whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple” (Luk 14:27). The cross stands for the reproach and the hatred of the world. But as the cross was voluntary for Christ, so it is for His disciple. It can be avoided or accepted, ignored or “taken up”!

But *secondly, the cross stands for a life that is voluntarily surrendered to the will of God*. From the standpoint of the world, the death was a voluntary sacrifice. Turn for a moment to the 10<sup>th</sup> [chapter] of John, beginning at the 17<sup>th</sup> verse: “Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again” (Joh 10:17). Why did He thus lay down His life? Look at the closing sentence of verse 18: “This commandment have I received of my Father.” The cross was the last demand of God upon the obedience of His Son. That is why we read in Philippians 2 that He “being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: <sup>7</sup> But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death” (that was the climax, that was the end of the path of obedience)—“even the death of the cross” (Phi 2:6-8).

Christ has left us an example that we should follow His steps. The obedience of Christ should be the obedience of the Christian—voluntary, not compulsory—voluntary, continuous, faithful, without any reserve, unto death. The cross, then, stands for obedience, consecration, surrender, a life placed at the disposal of God. “If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me,” and, “Whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.” In other words, dear friends, the cross stands for the principle of discipleship, our life being actuated<sup>14</sup> by the same principle that Christ’s was. He came here and He pleased not Himself: no more must I. He made Himself of no reputation: so must I. He went about doing good: so should I. He came not to be ministered unto but to minister: so should we. He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. That is what the cross stands for: First, the reproach of the world—because we have antago-

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<sup>14</sup> **actuated** – moved to action; motivated.

nized it, raised its ire by separating ourselves from it, and are walking on a different plane through being actuated by different principles from those by which it walks. Second, a life sacrificed unto God—laid down in devotion to Him.

In the third place, *the cross stands for vicarious sacrifice and suffering*. Turn to the First Epistle of John, the third chapter, verse 16: “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren.” That is the logic of Calvary. We are called unto fellowship with Christ, our lives to be lived by the same principles that His was lived by—obedience to God, sacrifice for others. He died that we might live and, my friends, we have to die that we may live. Look at the 25<sup>th</sup> verse of Matthew 16: “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it”—that means *every* Christian, for Christ was speaking there to disciples. Every Christian who has lived a self-centered life, considering his own comforts, his own peace of mind, his own welfare, his own advantages and benefits, that “life” is going to be lost forever—all wasted so far as eternity is concerned—wood, hay, and stubble that will go up in smoke. But “whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it,” that is, whosoever has not lived his life considering his own wellbeing, his own interests, his own profit, his own advancement, but has sacrificed that life, has spent it in the service of others for Christ’s sake—he shall find. “Find” what?—he shall find *it*, not something else. [*His life*], not another: he shall find it. That life has been immortalized, perpetuated; it has been built of imperishable materials that will survive the testing fire in the day to come. He shall find “it.” [Christ] died that we might live, and we have to die if we are to live! “Whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.”

Again, in the 20<sup>th</sup> chapter of John, Christ said to His disciples, “As *my* Father hath sent me, even so send I you” (Joh 20:21). What was Christ sent here to do? To glorify the Father: to express God’s love; to manifest God’s grace; to weep over Jerusalem; to have compassion on the ignorant and those that are out of the way; to toil so assiduously<sup>15</sup> that He had no leisure so much as to eat; to live a life of such self-sacrifice that even His kinsfolk said, “He is beside himself” (Mar 3:21); and, “As *my* Father hath sent me, even so,” says Christ, “send I you” (Joh 20:21). In other words, I send you back into the world out of which I have saved you. I send you back into the world to live with the cross stamped upon you. O brethren and sisters, how little “blood” there is in our lives! How little is there the bearing of the dying of Jesus in our bodies (2Co 4:10).

Have we begun to “take up the cross” at all? Is there any wonder that we are following Him at such a distance? Is there any wonder that we have such little victory over the power of indwelling sin? There is a reason for that. Mediatorially, the Cross of Christ stands alone, but experimentally the cross is to be shared by all His disciples. Legally the cross of Calvary annulled and put away our guilt, the guilt of our sins; but, my friends, I am perfectly convinced that the only way of getting deliverance from the power of sin in our lives and obtaining mastery over the old man within us is by the cross becoming a part of the experience of our souls. It was at the cross sin was dealt with legally and judicially; it is only as the cross is “taken up” by the disciple that it becomes an experience—slaying the power and defilement of sin within us. And Christ says, “Whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.” O what need has each Christian...to get alone with the Master and consecrate himself to His service!

From *Studies in the Scriptures*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

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**A.W. Pink (1886-1952):** English pastor, itinerate Bible teacher, author of *Studies in the Scriptures* and numerous books; born in Nottingham, England.



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<sup>15</sup> **assiduously** – carefully and persistently; diligently.

# SELFISHNESS AND SELF-DENIAL

Richard Baxter (1615-1691)

*“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.”—Luke 9:23*

**B**Y denying self is meant disclaiming, renouncing, disowning, and forsaking it. Self is here looked on partly as a party disjunct<sup>16</sup> from Christ and withdrawn from its due subordination to God, and partly as His competitor and opposite. Accordingly, it is to be denied, partly by neglect and partly by an opposition.

Before I come to tell you how far self must be denied...I shall show you what the disease of *selfishness* indeed is and so what self-denial is.

**1. When God had created man in His own image, He gave him a holy disposition<sup>17</sup> of soul, which might incline him to his Maker as his only felicity and ultimate end.<sup>18</sup>** He made him to be blessed in the sight of His glory—in the everlasting love of God, and [to] delight in Him and [in] praises of Him. This excellent employment and glory did God both fit him for and set before him.

But the first temptation did entice [Adam] to adhere to an inferior good for the pleasing of his flesh and the advancement of himself to a carnal kind of felicity in himself that he might be as God in knowing good and evil. Thus, man was suddenly taken with the creature<sup>19</sup> as a means to the pleasing of his carnal self, and so did depart from God, his true felicity. [He] retired into himself in his estimation, affection, and intention, and delivered up his reason in subjection to his sensuality and made himself his ultimate end.

With this sinful inclination are we all born into the world, so that every man, according to his corrupt nature, doth terminate all his desires in *himself*. Whatever he may notionally be convinced of to the contrary, yet practically he makes his earthly life and the advancement and pleasure that lie expecteth therein to be his felicity and end.

*Self-denial, now, is the cure of this.* It carrieth a man from himself again and showeth him that he was never made to be his own felicity or end. [It showeth him] that the flesh was not made to be pleased before God and that it is so poor, low, and short a felicity, [that] indeed [it] is but a name and shadow of felicity. When it pretends to that, [it is] a mere deceit. It showeth him how unreasonable, how impious,<sup>20</sup> and [how] unjust it is that a creature—and such a creature—should terminate his desires and intentions in himself. This is the principal part of self-denial.

**2. As God was man’s ultimate end in his state of innocency, so accordingly man was appointed to use all creatures [for the pleasure and glory of God]...**It was the work of man to do his Maker’s will, and he was to use nothing but with this intention.

But when man was fallen from God to himself, he afterwards used all things *for himself*, even his carnal self. All that he possessed [had] become the provision and fuel of his lusts. So the whole creation that he was capable of using was abused by him to this low and selfish end—as if all things had been made but for his delight and will.

*But when man is brought to deny himself*, he is brought to restore the creatures to their former use and not to sacrifice them to his fleshly mind. All that he hath and useth in the world is used to another end (as far as he denieth himself) than formerly it was—for God and not himself.

**3. In the state of innocency, though man had naturally an averseness from<sup>21</sup> death and bodily pains as being natural evils and had a desire of the welfare even of the flesh itself;<sup>22</sup> yet as his body was subject to his soul and his senses to his reason, so his bodily ease and welfare were to be esteemed, desired, and sought, but in a due sub-**

<sup>16</sup> **disjunct** – disjoined and distinct.

<sup>17</sup> **disposition** – temperament; inclination to act a particular way.

<sup>18</sup> **felicity and ultimate end** – happiness and object for which man exists.

<sup>19</sup> **creature** – creation.

<sup>20</sup> **impious** – lack of reverence for God.

<sup>21</sup> **an averseness from** – a mental attitude of opposition, disfavor, or dislike of.

<sup>22</sup> This seems to involve a bit of conjecture on the author’s part.

**ordination to his *spiritual* welfare, especially to his Maker's will.** So that though he was to value his life, yet he was much more to value his everlasting life and the pleasure and glory of his Lord.

But now, when man is fallen from God to himself, his life and earthly felicity is the sweetest and the dearest thing to him that is. He preferreth it before the pleasing of God and everlasting life; therefore, he seeketh it more and holdeth it faster as long as he can and parteth with it more unwillingly. As innocent nature had an appetite to the objects of sense, but corrupted nature hath an enraged, greedy, rebellious, and inordinate appetite to them, so innocent nature had a love to this natural, earthly life and the comforts of it. But corrupted nature hath such an inordinate love to them that all things else are made subordinate to them and swallowed up in this gulf. Even God Himself is loved as far as He befriendeth our carnal ends and furthereth our earthly prosperity and life.

*But when men are brought to deny themselves*, they are...restored to their first esteem of life and all the prosperity and earthly comforts of life. Now they have learned so to *love* them as to love God better, and so to *value* them as to prefer everlasting life before them. [They have learned] so to hold them and seek their preservation as to resign them to the will of God, to lay them down when we cannot hold them with His love, and to choose death in order to life everlasting, [rather than] life that would deprive us of it. And this is the principal instance of self-denial that Christ giveth us here in the text, as it is recited by all three evangelists that recite these words. "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it," and, "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"<sup>23</sup> By these instances, it appears that by self-denial, Christ doth mean a setting so light by all the world and by our own lives—and consequently our carnal contentment in these—as to be willing and resolved to part with them all rather than with Him and everlasting life; even as Abraham was bound to love his son Isaac, but so to prefer the love and will of God as to be able to sacrifice his son at God's command.

The Lord Jesus Himself was the liveliest pattern to us of this self-denial that ever the world saw! Indeed, His whole life was a continued practice of it. It hath oft convinced me that it is a special part of our sanctification,<sup>24</sup> when I have considered how abundantly the Lord hath exercised Himself in it for our example...Many do give up themselves to flesh-pleasing upon a misconceit that Christ did therefore deny *His* flesh to purchase them a liberty to please *theirs*. In His fasting and temptations and His sufferings by the reproach and ingratitude of men and [by] the outward poverty and meanness of His condition, the Lord was pleased to deny Himself, especially in His last passion and death. As I have showed elsewhere, He loved His natural life and peace. Therefore, in manifestation of that, He prayeth, "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me" (Luk 22:42). Yet when it came to the comparative practical act, He proceeded to choose His Father's will with death, rather than life without it. [He] therefore saith, "Not my will (that is, my simple love of life) but thine, be done" (Luk 22:42). In which very words, He manifested another will of His own besides that which He consenteth shall not be done. [He] showeth that He preferred the pleasing of His Father in the redemption of the world before His own life. Thus,...He causeth all His members to do, so that life and all the comforts of life are not as dear to them as the love of God and everlasting life.

**4. As man in innocency did know that he was not his own, so he knew that nothing that he had was his own.** [He knew] he was the steward of his Creator, *for* Whom he was to use them and *to* Whom he was accountable.

But when he was fallen from God to himself, though he had lost the right of a servant, yet he graspeth at the creature, as if he had the right of a lord! He now takes his goods, his lands, his money *to be his own!* Therefore, he thinks he may use them for himself and give God only some small contribution, lest he should disturb his possession. He saith as the impious ones, "Our lips *are* our own: who *is* lord over us?" (Psa 12:4). Though all of them know speculatively<sup>25</sup> that all is God's, yet practically they take it and use it as their own.

*But when grace teacheth them to deny themselves*, it strippeth them naked of all that they seemed proprietors of and maketh them confess that nothing is their own, but all is God's. To God they do devote it, and use it for Him and give Him His own, which the first Christians signified by selling all and laying [the money] at the apostles' feet (Act 4:34-37). Therefore, he asketh God what he shall do with it and how he shall use it. If God takes it from him, he can bless the name of the Lord with Job (1:21), as knowing He taketh but His own. [He] can say with Eli, "It *is* the LORD: let him do what seemeth him good" (1Sa 3:18). He knows that God may do with His own as He [wills] (Mat 20:15) and that he can have nothing but of His bounty. Therefore, it is His mercy that leaveth him anything; but it [would be] no wrong to him if He took away all. Thus, he understandeth that he is but a steward

<sup>23</sup> Matthew 16:25-26; Mark 8:35-36; Luke 9:24-25.

<sup>24</sup> **sanctification** – Sanctification is the work of God's Spirit whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God and are enabled more and more to die to sin, and live to righteousness. (Spurgeon's Catechism, Q. 34) See FGB 215, *Sanctification*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>25</sup> **speculatively** – in theory; according to general principle.

and therefore must use all that he hath for Him that he received it from. If he has children, his desire is to know which way they may be most serviceable to God; and to that, he will devote them. If he has wealth, honor, and power among men, his care is to know which way he may employ them for his Master's use, and so he will employ them. If he has wit and learning, his care is to serve God by it. If he has strength and time, he is thinking which way to improve them for his Lord. And if vain companions, the world, or fleshly delights would draw him to lay them out for them, he remembers that this were to waste his Master's stock upon his enemies. Though the sanctified man hath all things, yet he knows that he hath nothing. All things are his as God's steward, but nothing is properly and ultimately his own... Upon this ground he gives the devil, the world, and the flesh a denial when they would have his time, his tongue, his wit, his wealth, or anything that he possesseth. He telleth them, "They are none of mine, but God's; I received them, and I must be accountable for them. I had them not from you, and therefore I may not use them for you. I must give to God the things that are God's; that which is yours I will readily yield you." Thus, self-denial doth take off the sanctified from giving that which is God's unto themselves...

**5. As man had his being and wellbeing from God, so it is God only that can preserve and continue them.** Innocent man understood this and therefore lived in dependence upon God—looking to His hand for the supply of his wants and casting all his care upon Him. [Man trusted] Him wholly with himself and all, not distracting his own mind with cares and distrustful fears, but quieted and contented his mind in the wisdom, goodness, and all-sufficiency of God.

But when man was fallen to himself from God, he desired presently to have his portion or stock in his own hands and grew distrustful of God. [He] began to look upon himself as his own preserver (in a great measure), and therefore he fell to carking<sup>26</sup> and caring for himself, and to studious contrivances<sup>27</sup> for his own preservation and supplies. He searched every creature for himself and labored to find in it some good for himself, as if the care of himself had been wholly devolved on himself... Naturally now every man would fain have his safety and comforts in his own hand. He thinks them not so sure and well in the hand of God...

*But sanctification teacheth men self-denial that...* doth heal them of this disease. Though some actual knowledge of good and evil and some care of our natural selves [has] now become a necessary duty—as suited to our lapsed state that had never been but through sin—yet that which is sinful, self-denial doth destroy. It showeth man that he is every way insufficient for himself and that he is not the fountain of his own felicity. Nor doth it belong to him, but to God, to preserve him and secure his welfare. He seeth what a folly it is to depart from the tuition<sup>28</sup> of his heavenly Father and as the prodigal son to desire to have his portion in his own hands. Experience tells him with smart and sorrow that he hath not been so good a preserver of himself, nor used himself so well as to desire to be in the same hands any longer that have so abused him!... He now believes that he can be nowhere safe but in the hands of God, and no way sufficiently provided for, but by His wisdom, love, and power. [He dares not] trust himself hereafter with himself or *any* creature... He hath brought himself into a wilderness, lost himself, and raveled<sup>29</sup> his own affairs, when if he had committed himself to God and [had] been satisfied in His wisdom, love, and power, all had been kept safe and sound... Therefore, the returning, self-denying convert is brought to an utter distrust of himself and resolved hereafter to trust himself upon nothing below All-sufficiency and Infinite love... As the eyes of a servant are on the hand of his master, so are his eyes on God for all supplies.

This is the part of the work of the Spirit of adoption, Who teacheth us to cry, "Abba, Father" (Gal 4:6), and as children, not to be very careful for ourselves, but to run to our Father in all our wants, tell Him what we stand in need of, and beg relief. [The Spirit teacheth us] to be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer with supplication and thanksgiving to make known our requests to God (Phi 4:6). This acquiescence<sup>30</sup> of the soul in the love of God is [that which] keepeth our hearts and minds in that peace of God which passeth understanding (4:7). [Therefore,] the more self-denial, the less is a man dependent on himself or troubled with the cares of his own preservation—the more doth he cast himself on God and is careful to please Him that is his true preserver. [He] then quieteth and resteth his mind in His all-sufficiency, infinite wisdom, and love and so is a mere dependent upon God.

**6. Moreover, it is the prerogative<sup>31</sup> of God, as absolute owner of us, to be the sole disposer<sup>32</sup> of man and of all the other creatures, to choose their condition and give them their several talents, and [to] determine the events of**

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<sup>26</sup> **carking** – being anxious.

<sup>27</sup> **studious contrivances** – giving careful attention to planning and scheming.

<sup>28</sup> **tuition** – condition of being taken care of; safekeeping.

<sup>29</sup> **raveled** – entangled; confused.

<sup>30</sup> **acquiescence** – resting satisfied.

<sup>31</sup> **prerogative** – exclusive privilege or right.

<sup>32</sup> **disposer** – one who regulates or governs; ruler.

**all their affairs as pleaseth Himself.** Innocent man was contented with this order and well pleased that God should be the absolute disposer of him and all.

But when man turned from God to self, he presently desired to be the disposer of himself, and not of himself only, but of *all* creatures within his reach! How fain would selfish, corrupted man be the chooser of his own condition! His will is against the will of God, and he usually disliketh God's disposal.<sup>33</sup> If he had the matter in his *own* hands, almost nothing should be as it is; but so [opposed] would they be to God that all things would be turned upside down, if it were their will. There is scarce a poor man but would be rich; and scarce a rich man but would be richer. The servant would be master; the tenant would be a landlord. The husbandman and tradesman would be a gentleman; the laborer would live an easier life—his house should be better, his clothing should be better, his fare should be better, his provision should be greater, his credit or honor with men should be more. The gentleman would be a knight, and the knight a lord. The lord would be a king, and the king would be more absolute and have a larger dominion. Nay, every man would be a king...and they should reign as lords and princes in the earth. If it were with selfish men as they would have it, there is scarce a man that would be what he is, nor dwell where he doth, nor live at the rates that now he liveth at. The weak would be always strong; and the sick would be well and *always* well. The old would be young again and never taste the infirmities of age; and if they might live as long as they would, I think there are few of the unsanctified that would ever die or look after heaven as long as they could live on earth! "Oh, what a brave<sup>34</sup> life should I have," thinks the selfish, unsanctified wretch, "if I were but wholly at my own disposal, and might be what I would be, and have what I would have!" What would men give for such a life as this!...

*But when sanctification hath brought men to self-denial*, then they discern and lament this folly. They see what silly, giddy<sup>35</sup> worms they are to be disposers of themselves or of the world. They see that they have [no] wisdom, goodness, or power sufficient for so great a work. They then perceive that it were better [to] make an idiot<sup>36</sup> the pilot of a ship, or an infant to be their physician when they are sick or the disposer of their estates than to commit themselves and the world to their disposal. They see how foolishly they have endeavored or desired to rob God of His prerogative; and therefore they return from themselves to Him and give up all by free consent to His sole disposal so that He may do with His own as He list.<sup>37</sup> He finds that he hath work enough to do of his own and [hath] become too unfit for that; therefore, he dares no more [to] undertake the work of God for which he is infinitely unfit. He finds that the more he hath his own will, the worse it goes with him; therefore, he will give himself up to God and stand to His will...

**7. Moreover, it is the high prerogative of God to be the Sovereign Ruler of the world**—to make laws for them that must be obeyed and to reward the obedient and punish the disobedient. God is King of all the earth, even King of kings and Lord of lords. All shall obey Him or be judged by Him for their disobedience.

But sin turned man into a rebel against heaven and a traitor to his Maker, so that now the selfish, unsanctified man disliketh God's government—at least in the particulars—and would govern himself. The Law of God contained in His word and works he murmurs at as too obscure or too precise and strict for him. He finds that it crosseth his carnal interest and speaks not good of him but evil. Therefore, he is against it as supposing it to be against him and his pleasure, profit, and honor in the world. If men had but the government of themselves, what a difference would there be between their way and God's! If corrupt, unsanctified, selfish man might make a law for himself instead of the Word of God, what a law would it be! And how much of the Law of God should be repealed! If sinners might make a Scripture, you should find in it no such passages as, "Except a man be born again," or converted, "he cannot see the kingdom of God" (Joh 3:5). "Follow...holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Heb 12:14). If self might make laws, you should not read in them, "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live" (Rom 8:13). Nor should you there find, "Strait *is* the gate, and narrow *is* the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Mat 7:14), or that "the righteous scarcely be saved" (1Pe 4:18). All the Scripture is now for holiness and against profaneness, ungodliness, and sensuality; if self had the framing of it, it should all be changed, and it should at least speak peace to fleshly-minded men. All those true and dreadful passages that speak fire and brimstone against the unsanctified and [that] threaten everlasting torments should be razed out. You [would] find no talk of damnation in the Scripture for such as they: "Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched" (Mar 9:44); or, "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Mat 7:23); or, "The way of the ungodly shall perish" (Psa 1:6);

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<sup>33</sup> **disposal** – control.

<sup>34</sup> **brave** – excellent.

<sup>35</sup> **giddy** – foolish; stupid.

<sup>36</sup> **idiot** – one so lacking in mental ability as to be incapable of ordinary acts of reasoning.

<sup>37</sup> **list** – wills.

or, “The Lord shall laugh at him: for he seeth that his day is coming” (Psa 37:13). Abundance of the Bible would be wiped out if carnal self had but the altering of it! Nay, it would be quite made new and made a contrary thing...Every one of the Ten Commandments would be altered, as I shall after show. Idolatry should be no sin, but the principal law; for *self* would be set up as the idol of the world. Will-worship would be no sin. Men would be held guiltless that take the name of God in vain. The Lord’s Day would be a day of mirth and carnal pleasure; every subject would be the sovereign and every inferior the superior. Revenge would be made lawful for themselves, though not for others. Fornication and adultery would be no mortal sin. Stealing would be made tolerable to themselves. It should be lawful to them to do any wrong to the name and reputation of another. In a word, every man would do what he [wills], his will would be his law, and [he] would be his own judge—a gentle, tender judge, no doubt. Thus would *self* rule.

*But sanctification brings men to deny this self*, to lay down the arms of rebellion against God, and to see how unfit we are to rule ourselves. [It brings us to see] that we are too foolish, simple, and partial to make laws and too partial and tender to execute them. [It brings us to see] that as we were made to obey, obey we must; [we] come again into our ranks and willingly subject ourselves to the Sovereign of the world. Self-denial teacheth a man to hate his own carnal wisdom and reasonings that rise up against the laws of God and to love them the worse because they are thus his own. [It teaches him] to love the laws of God the better because they are *God’s* and because they are against his carnal self...If he might have his choice, he would not blot out one commandment, nor one direction, nor one article of faith, nor a tittle of the Law because self is not the chooser in him; but he hath learned to submit to the will and wisdom of the Lord.

Though he loves himself and has a nature that is unwilling of suffering and feareth the displeasure of God and the threatenings of His holy Law, yet doth he unfeignedly<sup>38</sup> justify the Law and acknowledge it to be holy, just, and good. If he had his choice, [he] would not have the very threatenings of it to be repealed and blotted out; for he knows that the determinations of God are the best and that none but He is fit to govern. Therefore, he desires that he himself may be taught better to obey, and not that he may rule. [He] wisheth that he were more conformed to the Law, and not that the Law were conformed to him. And fain,<sup>39</sup> he would have his own will brought up to God’s, but wisheth not God’s will to be crooked<sup>40</sup> and brought down to his. As far as men have self-denial, this is so.

**8. Moreover, as it is God’s prerogative to be the Sovereign Ruler of ourselves, so also of all others as well as us.** But when sin had set up self, man would not only rule himself, but would rule all others. There is an eager desire in the unsanctified, selfish heart that he might be ruler of town and country and [that] all might be brought to do his will. Hence it is that there is such resisting and grudging at good governors and that men are so ambitious and fain would be highest because they would have their *own* wills fulfilled by all. Therefore, [they] would have power to force men to it! Hence it is that there is such a stir in the world for crowns and kingdoms. Few men have ever been heard of that have refused a scepter when it was offered them, yea, or that would not step out of their way for it, wound their consciences, and hazard all their hopes of heaven for it...Nothing more pleaseth the carnal mind than to have his will, to have all men do what he would have them [to], to see them at his beck,<sup>41</sup> and each man seeking to know his pleasure, ready to receive his word for law. This is the reign of self.

But sanctification teacheth men self-denial, doth make them look first at the doing of God’s will, and would have all the world obedient to that! For their own wills, they resign them absolutely to God’s and would not have men obey them but in a due subordination to the Lord. As they affect<sup>42</sup> no dominion or government but for God, so they desire not men to obey their wills any further than it is necessary to the obedience of God’s will...The self-denying, sanctified man hath as careful an eye up and down the world for God’s interest as the self-seeker hath for his own. As eagerly doth he long to hear of the setting up of the name, kingdom, and will or laws of God in the world as the ambitious man longs for the setting up of his own. It as much rejoiceth the holy, self-denying man to hear that God’s laws are set up and obeyed and that the world doth stoop to Jesus Christ, as it would rejoice the carnal, selfish wretch to be the lord and master of himself and his will become the law of the world! A holy, self-denying man would be far gladder to hear that Africa, America, and the rest of the unbelieving part of the world were converted to Christ by the power of the gospel, that the heathens were His inheritance, and the kingdoms of the world become the kingdoms of Christ than if he had conquered all these himself and were become the king or emperor of the world! For as *self* is the chief interest of an unsanctified man, so Christ and the will of God is the

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<sup>38</sup> **unfeignedly** – sincerely.

<sup>39</sup> **fain** – gladly; willingly.

<sup>40</sup> **crooked** – perverted.

<sup>41</sup> **at his beck** – under his absolute control.

<sup>42</sup> **affect** – seek to obtain.

chief interest of the sanctified; for he hath destroyed the contradictory interest of self and renounced it. [He] hath taken God for his end and Christ for the way, and consequently, for his highest interest. Now he hath no business in the world but God's business. He hath no honor to regard but God's honor. He hath none to exalt but the King of kings! He knows no gain but the pleasing of God. He knows no content or pleasure but God's pleasure. For the life that he now lives in the flesh, he lives by faith of the Son of God that hath loved him, given Himself for him, and thereby hath drawn him out of himself to the fountain and end of love; so it is not he that lives, but Christ [that] liveth in him (Gal 2:20).

**9. Lastly, it is the high prerogative of God to have the honor, power, and glory ascribed to Him, [to] be praised as the author of all good to the world—His glory He will not give to another (Isa 42:8).** Man and all things are created, preserved, and ordered for His glory, nor shall man have any glory but in the glorifying of his Lord. When we fell short of glorifying the Lord, we also fell short of the glory that we expected by Him.

But when sin turned man from God to himself, he became regardless of<sup>43</sup> the honor of God. His mind was bent on his own honor, so that he would have every knee bow to himself, every eye observe him, every mind think highly of him, and every tongue praise and magnify him. It doth him good at the heart to have virtue, wisdom, and greatness ascribed to him—and an excellency in all. [It doth him good at the heart] to have all the good that is done ascribed to him, to be taken as the sun in the firmament that all must eye and none can live without, and to be esteemed the benefactor of all. When he hears that men extol him and speak nothing but well of him, [nothing but] great things; when he sees them all observe and reverence him and take him as an oracle for wisdom or as an angel of God, oh! *how this pleaseth his unsanctified, selfish mind!* Now he hath his end, even that which he would have. “Verily,” saith Christ, “they have their reward” (Mat 6:4, 5, 16).

*But when sanctification hath taught men to deny themselves,* they see then that they are vile and miserable sinners. [They] loathe themselves for all their abominations, are base in their own eyes, humble themselves before the Lord, and abhor themselves in dust and ashes. [They] say, “O Lord, righteousness *belongeth* unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces” (Dan 9:7); “Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory” (Psa 115:1). The holy, self-denying soul desireth no glory and honor, but what may conduce to the glory and honor of his Lord. His heart riseth against base, flattering worldlings that would rob God and give the honor to [himself]; nor can they do him a greater displeasure than to ascribe to him [that] which belongeth only to God, or to bring to him or any creature his Maker's due. If God is honored, he takes himself as honored, if he is never so low. If God is dishonored, he is troubled; and his own honor will not make him reparation.<sup>44</sup> As he liveth himself to the glory of God and doth all that he doth in the world to that end, so would he have others do so too. And if God is most honored by his disgrace and shame, he can submit.

Thus, I have showed you the true nature both of selfishness and of self-denial. But observe that I describe it as it is in itself; yet there is too much selfishness in the best, which may hinder the fullness of these effects. But self-denial is predominant in all the sanctified, though it be not perfect.

From “A Treatise on Self-denial,” in *Baxter's Practical Works*, Vol. 3, reprinted by Soli Deo Gloria, a division of Reformation Heritage Books, [www.heritagebooks.org](http://www.heritagebooks.org).

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**Richard Baxter (1615-1691):** Puritan preacher and theologian in the Church of England; born in Rowton, Shropshire, England.



A Christian must not be so attached to his life, but must by faith commend it into the hands of his Father and rest in this. If then the cause of Christ is at stake, and we must either forsake our life or forsake and deny Christ, the person who denies self will surrender his life and will be glad that he has something precious that he may yield to Christ.—*Wilhelmus à Brakel*

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<sup>43</sup> **regardless of** – without due thought or consideration for.

<sup>44</sup> **make him reparation** – make amends for the wrong that has been done.

# LEARNING SELF-DENIAL FROM CHRIST

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

*“Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.”—1 Peter 2:24*

**N**OTE carefully the words of the text. It saith not only that Christ bore our sins; but from the full, unqualified expression that is used, it is implied that He bore them all: “Who his own self bare our sins.” That is to say, whatever sins a believer has ever committed or ever will commit, Christ bore them on the tree. Sins original and sins natural; sins actual and practical; sins of thought, word, and deed; heinous sin—blasphemies, uncleannesses; those that are thought to be the minor sins—evil imaginations, hasty words; I will not go on with the list, for time would fail me to get to the end of it! But when you have mentioned all the sins you can think of, I can still say that the text covers them all: “Who his own self bare our sins”—not some of them, not the greater ones, not the lesser ones to the exclusion of the greater, but all our sins: *“in his own body on the tree”*...

And the text...teaches us that Christ completely bore all our sins: “Who his own self bare our sins.” They were all laid upon Him, and He did effectually carry them away and make an end of them. He bore them “to the tree,” says the margin, and crucified them there. He carried them, upon His shoulders, up to the cross, and there, once for all, annihilated them, so that they have ceased to be. O my soul, rejoice as thou dost look upon the Sin-bearer, Who made a full, complete, and absolutely acceptable atonement, finished transgression, made an end of sins, made reconciliation for iniquity, and brought in everlasting righteousness, as it was foretold that the Messiah would do. In this, we do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice!

The text also implies, from its being free from any kind of limitation, that Christ alone bore them: “Who his own self bare our sins.” There was no Peter, James, or John to help Him in His hour of deepest need; nor did an angel tread that winepress side by side with Him. Alone and single-handed, our great Champion entered the arena and won the victory for us. Let this be one of the chief articles in our creed henceforth and for evermore.

I say to the man who calls himself a priest, “No, sir, I do not want any absolution<sup>45</sup> from you, even though you may be a lineal descendant of the apostles—through Judas Iscariot—for I am perfectly satisfied with the forgiveness that I have obtained by faith in Christ Jesus. You say that you can offer for me the unbloody sacrifice of the mass in order to help in the putting away of my sin; but I need nothing of the kind, for Christ, His own self, bare our sins in His own body on the tree.” On that tree, He Himself said of His atoning sacrifice, “It is finished” (Joh 19:30). “But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified” (Heb 10:12-14). Let these words roll out like a thunder peal, and let all men know that there is no need of any addition to that sacrifice—either of penance, or purgatory, or human merit, or priestly power—nor can there be any repetition of it. Love’s redeeming work was done by Christ alone, and in Him we rest, and in Him alone.

The sweetness, however, of this passage lies in the fact that Christ bore our sins. Come, brethren and sisters, can we all say, “Christ bore our sins”? I am not now talking of the general aspect of the work of Christ, for it had a special aspect to believers; and the full blessings of the atonement only come to them. “Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it” (Eph 5:25).

Can we say, then, “Who his own self bare our sins”? Let me put it in the singular and pass it round to each one here: can you say, my friend, “Who his own self bare *my* sins in his own body on the tree”? *My* sins, so many and so heavy, and once so terrible to me—He bore them, bore them all, and I am clear and free from every charge because He bore them. This is being saved. I trust Christ and know in consequence that He bore my sins—*then I am*

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<sup>45</sup> **absolution** – forgiveness of sins declared by church authority.

*saved*. How many of you are thus saved? May the heart-searching Spirit of God go from soul to soul and constrain you to give a true answer.

If you cannot reply in the way we wish, give the other answer, and say, “I do not know that Christ did bear my sins.” When you get home, write that down, and look at it: “I am not trusting in Christ. I have neither part nor lot in Him. My sin is pressing upon me, but I have no saving interest in Christ.” I think that if you were to write that down legibly with pen and ink, then sit down a little while and think it over, it might be much more useful to you than any word of mine.

“No, sir,” you say, “I should not like to write that.” But, surely, you may write what is true. A man ought not to be afraid to know the truth about his spiritual state, nor yet to write it for his own eye to see. I do not ask you to print it in the newspaper or in a book, but just to put it down for your own information: “I am without Christ; I am an unbeliever; I am still in my sins. If I die as I am, I shall be lost.” Oh, may God grant that you may see your true condition, feel it, and not rest until you can say, “Now I have believed, and I know that Christ, His own self, bore *my* sins in His own body on the tree.” If you are trusting Him, you know that He did so. Your faith is the evidence of your election and the proof of your redemption; and if you do but simply and completely trust Him, He has saved you. You may rejoice in the fact that, in the sight of God, you are fully and freely forgiven.

Jesus Christ bore our sins in His own body on the tree. He was not constrained to do it. He might still have remained in heaven, sharing in all His Father’s glory, forever. But, out of love and pity for us, He descended from His divine eminence,<sup>46</sup> veiled His Godhead in our humanity, and came to earth among the sons of men that He might bear His people’s sins up to the tree and away from the tree.

**Can anybody measure the self-denial of the Savior in acting thus?** Is it possible for us to estimate the stoop of love and the amazing suffering that He endured for us? Then, let us learn from Him what self-sacrifice means.

I do not believe in our service for Christ always being pleasant. If we are truly His servants, there will sometimes be a galling<sup>47</sup> of the shoulders by the yoke of our servitude, and we shall delight to be thus galled for His sake. Has any Christian man ever given what he ought to give until he reaches the pinching point when he has to deny himself in order that he may give to God’s cause? Has a Christian man ever done for his Savior what he ought to do, if he has not come to the point of real self-denial in it?...

I do not expect much from some people; but from those for whom Christ died, from those whose sins He bore, we ought to expect anything and everything of which they are capable, if they act up to the measure of their sacred obligations! Many servants of our Lord Jesus Christ have been content to be poor or have been satisfied to abide in a very lowly station in life or have been willing to go to distant lands and suffer great privations and hardships. The secret of their willingness to deny themselves has been that each of them could truly say, “Christ denied Himself for my sake. He bore my sin on Calvary’s cross; and if His blessed and perfect shoulders could bear the load of my sin, shall I not bear the far lighter load of His service? Shall I not take His yoke upon me, and learn of Him, as He has bidden me do?”

Are you worried by the little troubles of the family? Are you getting tired of trying to bear a testimony for Christ in the workshop? Are you becoming weary, my brother or my sister? Then remember what Paul wrote to the Hebrews, “Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds” (Heb 12:3). Think how He bore your sins, and from this moment feel, “I will count self-denial to be a luxury if I may but exhibit to Him my love, and let Him see that I am not altogether oblivious of that which He endured for me.”

Come, beloved, can you not be stirred up to some nobler form of love than you have ever before known? Is there not something more that you could do, or something more that you could suffer by way of proving your love to Him Who, His own self, bore your sins in His own body on the tree?

**In the next place, see what abasement there was in Jesus Christ bearing our sins.** Up, up, up, our soaring thoughts may fly, but we can never reach the height of His magnificence in the eternal world with the Father. Yet down, down, down He comes, until He is a poor man—nay, more, a despised man, a suffering man, a condemned man, a crucified man, a dead man, lying in a borrowed tomb!

That is a wondrous stoop, but the greatest condescension of all is indicated by that expression in our text, “Who his own self bare our sins.” Well, then, what say we concerning this abasement of our Lord? Why, surely, that we ought to be ready to be despised and reproached for Christ’s name’s sake. I think we get off wonderfully easy in these days, compared with what some Christians have had to bear for Christ’s sake and the gospel’s. Yet, in days

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<sup>46</sup> **eminence** – lofty position.

<sup>47</sup> **galling** – sore by rubbing; chafing.

gone by, some of us have known what it was to have all manner of evil spoken against us falsely and to be reviled again and again for Christ's sake. It is a good thing when a Christian minister feels that he has given up his character and everything else to Christ, so that if men choose to slander and abuse him, he will bear it all so long as he may thereby but honor Christ and keep his conscience clean.

If you are a Christian, you must expect to be dragged through all the muddy pools that your persecutors can find. If you do even a little wrong, they will magnify it a thousand times. If you do no wrong at all, the most blameless life will not enable you to escape from the envenomed tongue of slander. If that is your lot, just bear it. Be willing to be Christ's servant, to be, as the apostle Paul was, Christ's branded slave, bearing in your body the marks of the Lord Jesus...

I know that some of you young people get dreadfully frightened at the ugly epithets<sup>48</sup> that have been applied to you. Perhaps you say that you do not like to be ridiculed because you are a Christian. Why, you ought to be proud of such treatment! Just adopt the very nickname that they give you, and let it be to you what the stars and garters<sup>49</sup> are to the nobility of England! Bear it as the insignia of a Knight Companion of the Cross of Christ. The Lord grant you grace in this matter to account the reproach of Christ to be greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt!

Those two things are, I think, clearly enough set forth in the text: our Savior's self-sacrifice and self-abasement; and it is equally clear that those who would be His followers should imitate Him, as far as they can, in both these respects.

From a sermon delivered at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington,  
on Lord's Day evening, June 23, 1878.

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**Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892):** Influential English Baptist; history's most widely read preacher; born at Kelvedon, Essex, England.



The *self-denial* of Christ is the pattern of believers, and their conformity unto it is their indispensable duty. "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (2Co 8:9). Jesus Christ, for the glory of God, and the love He bare to the elect, denied Himself all the delights and pleasures of this world...He was all His lifetime in the world, "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Isa 53:5). "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air *have* nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay *his* head" (Mat 8:20). Yet this was the least part of Christ's self-denial: What did He not deny when He left the bosom of His Father, with the ineffable delight and pleasures He there enjoyed from eternity, and instead thereof to drink the cup, the bitter cup of His Father's wrath, for our sakes? O Christians, look to your pattern, and imitate your self-denying Savior.—*John Flavel*

## CHRIST'S CROSS AND OURS

John Calvin (1509-1564)

**A**LTHOUGH the Law of God contains a perfect rule of conduct admirably arranged, it has seemed proper to our divine Master to train His people by a more accurate method to the rule that is enjoined in the Law. The leading principle in the method is that it is the duty of believers to present their "bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God, which is their reasonable service" (Rom 12:1). [From this is derived] the exhortation: "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Rom 12:2). The great point, then, is that we are consecrated and dedicated to God and therefore should not henceforth think, speak, design, or act without a view to His glory. What He hath made sacred cannot, without signal<sup>50</sup> insult to Him, be applied to profane<sup>51</sup> use. But if we are not our own but the Lord's (1Co 6:19), it is plain both what error is to be shunned and to what end the ac-

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<sup>48</sup> **epithets** – offensive or derogatory expressions used of a person.

<sup>49</sup> **stars and garters** – medals, honors, and decorations awarded by the British Empire.

<sup>50</sup> **signal** – striking in seriousness.

<sup>51</sup> **profane** – common, as distinguished from what is sacred.

tions of our lives ought to be directed.

We are not our own: therefore, neither our own reason nor will is to rule our acts and counsels. We are not our own: therefore, let us not make it our end to seek what may be agreeable to our carnal<sup>52</sup> nature. We are not our own: therefore, as far as possible, let us forget ourselves and the things that are ours.

On the other hand, we are God's: let us therefore live and die to Him (Rom 14:8). We are God's: therefore, let His wisdom and will preside over all our actions. We are God's: to Him, then, as the only legitimate end, let every part of our life be directed (Rom 14:8; 1Co 6:19). O, how great the proficiency<sup>53</sup> of him who, [when] taught that he is not his own, has withdrawn the dominion and government of himself from his own reason that he may give them to God! For as the surest source of destruction to men is to obey themselves, so the only haven of safety is to have no other will, no other wisdom, than to follow the Lord wherever He leads.

Let this then be the first step: to abandon ourselves and devote the whole energy of our minds to the service of God. By service, I mean not only that which consists in verbal obedience, but that by which the mind, divested of its own carnal feelings, implicitly obeys the call of the Spirit of God. This transformation, which Paul calls the *renewing* of the mind (Rom 12:2; Eph 4:23), though it is the first entrance to life, was unknown to all the philosophers. They give the government of man to *reason* alone, thinking that she alone is to be listened to; in short, they assign to her the sole direction of the conduct. But Christian philosophy bids her give place and yield complete submission to the Holy Spirit, so that the man himself no longer lives, but Christ lives and reigns in him (Gal 2:20).

**VII. 2.** Hence follows the other principle: we are not to seek our own, but the Lord's will, and act with a view to promote His glory. Great is our proficiency when, almost forgetting ourselves—certainly postponing our own reason—we faithfully make it our study to obey God and His commandments. For when Scripture enjoins us to lay aside private regard to ourselves, it not only divests our minds of an excessive longing for wealth, power, or human favor, but also eradicates all ambition and thirst for worldly glory and other more secret pests.<sup>54</sup> The Christian ought, indeed, to be so trained and disposed as to consider that during his whole life he has to do with God. For this reason, as he will bring all things to the disposal and estimate of God, so he will religiously direct his whole mind to Him. For he who has learned to look to God in everything he does is at the same time diverted from all vain thoughts. This is that self-denial that Christ so strongly enforces on His disciples from the very outset (Mat 16:24), which, as soon as it takes hold of the mind, leaves no place either, first, for pride, show, and ostentation,<sup>55</sup> or, secondly, for avarice,<sup>56</sup> lust, luxury, effeminacy,<sup>57</sup> or other vices which are engendered by self-love (2Ti 3:2-5). On the contrary, wherever [self-denial] does not reign, the foulest vices are indulged in without shame. Or if there is some appearance of virtue, it is vitiated<sup>58</sup> by a depraved<sup>59</sup> longing for applause. Show me, if you can, an individual who, unless he has renounced himself in obedience to the Lord's command, is disposed to do good for its own sake. Those who have not so renounced themselves have followed virtue at least for the sake of praise. The philosophers who have contended most strongly that virtue is to be desired on her own account were so inflated with arrogance as to make it apparent that they sought virtue for no other reason than as a ground for indulging in pride. So far, therefore, is God from being delighted with these hunters after popular applause with their swollen breasts that He declares they have received their reward in this world (Mat 6:2,5,16), and that harlots and publicans are nearer the kingdom of heaven than they (Mat 21:31). We have not yet sufficiently explained how great and numerous are the obstacles by which a man is impeded in the pursuit of rectitude,<sup>60</sup> so long as he has not renounced himself. The old saying is true, "There is a world of iniquity treasured up in the human soul." Nor can you find any other remedy for this than to deny yourself, renounce your own reason, and direct your whole mind to the pursuit of those things that the Lord requires of you and that you are to seek only because they are pleasing to Him...

**VIII.1.** The pious mind must ascend still higher, namely, [to the place] Christ calls His disciples when He says that every one of them must "take up his cross" (Mat 16:24). Those whom the Lord has chosen and honored with His [fellowship] must prepare for a hard, laborious, troubled life, a life full of many and various kinds of evils—it

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<sup>52</sup> **carnal** – fleshly; sensual, as opposed to spiritual.

<sup>53</sup> **proficiency** – progress made.

<sup>54</sup> **pests** – plagues, i.e., destructive desires of the soul.

<sup>55</sup> **ostentation** – display intended to attract notice or admiration; showing off.

<sup>56</sup> **avarice** – extreme greed.

<sup>57</sup> **effeminacy** – having qualities more often associated with women than with men.

<sup>58</sup> **vitiated** – made ineffective.

<sup>59</sup> **depraved** – corrupt; wicked.

<sup>60</sup> **rectitude** – uprightness; morality in mind and conduct.

being the will of our heavenly Father to exercise His people in this way while putting them to the proof. Having begun this course with Christ the first-born, He continues it towards all His children. For though that Son was dear to Him above others, the Son in Whom He was “well pleased” (Mat 3:17; 17:5), yet we see that far from being treated gently and indulgently, we may say that not only was He subjected to a perpetual cross while He dwelt on earth, but His whole life was nothing else than a kind of perpetual cross. The Apostle assigns the reason: “Though he was a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered” (Heb 5:8).

Why then should we exempt ourselves from that condition to which Christ our Head behoved<sup>61</sup> to submit—especially since He submitted on our account that He might in His own person exhibit a model of patience? Wherefore, the Apostle declares that all the children of God are destined to be conformed to Him (Rom 8:29). Hence, it affords us great consolation in hard and difficult circumstances, which men deem evil and adverse, to think that we are holding fellowship with the sufferings of Christ: as He passed to celestial<sup>62</sup> glory through a labyrinth of many woes, so we too are conducted thither through various tribulations. For in another passage, Paul himself thus speaks, “We must through much tribulation enter the kingdom of God” (Act 14:22). Again, “That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death” (Phi 3:10). How powerfully should it soften the bitterness of the cross to think that the more we are afflicted with adversity, the surer we are made of our fellowship with Christ...

**VIII. 2.** We may add that the only thing that made it necessary for our Lord to undertake to bear the cross was to testify and prove His obedience to the Father. There are many reasons that make it necessary for us to live constantly under the cross. Feeble as we are by nature and prone to ascribe all perfection to our flesh—unless we receive as it were ocular<sup>63</sup> demonstration of our weakness—we readily estimate our virtue above its proper worth and doubt not that whatever happens, it will stand unimpaired and invincible against all difficulties. Hence, we indulge a stupid and empty confidence in the flesh, and then, trusting to it, wax proud against the Lord Himself as if our own faculties were sufficient without His grace.

This arrogance cannot be better repressed than when He proves to us by experience, not only how great our weakness is, but also our frailty. Therefore, He visits us with disgrace, poverty, bereavement,<sup>64</sup> disease, or other afflictions. Feeling altogether unable to support them, we forthwith, as far as regards ourselves, give way, and thus humbled learn to invoke His strength, which alone can enable us to bear up under a weight of affliction. Nay, even the holiest of men, however well aware that they stand not in their own strength but by the grace of God, would feel too secure in their own fortitude and constancy were they not brought to a more thorough knowledge of themselves by the trial of the cross. This feeling gained even upon David: “And in my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved. LORD, by thy favour thou hast made my mountain to stand strong: thou didst hide thy face, *and* I was troubled” (Psa 30:6-7). He confesses that in prosperity his feelings were dulled and blunted, so that, neglecting the grace of God on which alone he ought to have depended, he leant to himself and promised himself perpetuity. If it so happened to this great prophet, who of us should not fear and study caution?...Believers, I say, warned by such proofs of their diseases, make progress in humility and, divesting themselves of a depraved confidence in the flesh, betake themselves to the grace of God. When they have so betaken themselves, [they] experience the presence of the divine power in which is ample protection.

**VIII. 3.** This Paul teaches when he says that tribulation worketh patience and patience experience (Rom 5:3-4). God having promised that He will be with believers in tribulation (2Co 1:4), they feel the truth of the promise; while supported by His hand, they endure patiently. This they could never do by their own strength. Patience, therefore, gives the saints an experimental proof that God in reality furnishes the aid that He has promised whenever there is need. Hence also their faith is confirmed, for it were very ungrateful not to expect that in [the] future the truth of God will be, as they have already found it, firm and constant. We now see how many advantages are at once produced by the cross. Overturning the overweening<sup>65</sup> opinion we form of our own virtue and detecting the hypocrisy in which we delight, it removes our pernicious carnal confidence, teaching us, when thus humbled, to recline on God alone, so that we neither are oppressed nor despond. Then, victory is followed by hope, inasmuch as the Lord, by performing what He has promised, establishes His truth concerning the future. Were these the only reasons, it is surely plain how necessary it is for us to bear the cross. It is of no little importance to be rid of your self-love and made fully conscious of your weakness; so impressed with a sense of your weakness as to learn to distrust yourself; to distrust yourself so as to transfer your confidence to God, reclining on Him with such

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<sup>61</sup> **behoved** – was required.

<sup>62</sup> **celestial** – pertaining to heaven, as the abode of God; heavenly.

<sup>63</sup> **ocular** – visible; received by actual sight.

<sup>64</sup> **bereavement** – being deprived of anything, but especially a loved one by death.

<sup>65</sup> **overweening** – arrogant.

heartfelt confidence as to trust in His aid and continue invincible to the end, standing by His grace so as to perceive that He is true to His promises and so assured of the certainty of His promises as to be strong in hope.

**VIII. 4.** Another end that the Lord has in afflicting His people is to try their patience and train them to obedience: they can [not] yield obedience to Him except in so far as He enables them. But He is pleased thus to attest and display striking proofs of the graces that He has conferred upon His saints, lest they should remain within—unseen and unemployed. Accordingly, by bringing forward openly the strength and constancy of endurance with which He has provided His servants, He is said to try their patience. Hence, the expressions that God tempted Abraham (Gen 22:1, 12) and made proof of his piety by [the fact that he declined not] to sacrifice his only son. Hence, too, Peter tells us that our faith is proved by tribulation, just as gold is tried in a furnace of fire (1Pe 1:7). But who will say it is not expedient that the most excellent gift of patience that the believer has received from his God should be applied to uses by being made sure and manifest? Otherwise, men would never value it according to its worth.

But if God Himself, to prevent the virtues that He has conferred upon believers from lurking in obscurity, nay, lying useless and perishing, does aright in supplying materials for calling them forth, there is the best reason for the afflictions of the saints, since without them their patience could not exist. I say that by the cross they are also trained to obedience because they are thus taught to live not according to their own wish, but at the disposal of God. Indeed, did all things proceed as they wish, they would not know what it is to follow God. Seneca<sup>66</sup> mentions that there was an old proverb when any one was exhorted to endure adversity: “*Follow God*”—thereby intimating that men truly submitted to the yoke of God only when they gave their back and hand to His rod. But if it is most right that we should prove our obedience to our heavenly Father in all things, certainly we ought not to decline any method by which He trains us to obedience.

**VIII. 5.** Still, however, we see not how necessary that obedience is, unless we at the same time consider how prone our carnal nature is to shake off the yoke of God whenever it has been treated with some degree of gentleness and indulgence. It just happens to it as with refractory<sup>67</sup> horses, which, if kept idle for a few days at hack and manger,<sup>68</sup> become ungovernable and no longer recognize the rider whose command before they implicitly obeyed. And we invariably become what God complains of in the people of Israel: waxing gross and fat, we kick against Him Who reared and nursed us (Deu 32:15). The kindness of God should allure us to ponder and love His goodness. But since such is our malignity that we are invariably corrupted by His indulgence, it is more than necessary for us to be restrained by discipline from breaking forth into such petulance. Thus, lest we become emboldened by an over-abundance of wealth; lest elated with honor, we grow proud; lest inflated with other advantages of body, mind, or fortune, we grow insolent—the Lord Himself interferes as He sees to be expedient by means of the cross, subduing and curbing the arrogance of our flesh, and that in various ways as the advantage of each requires. For as we do not all equally labor under the same disease, so we do not all need the same difficult cure. Hence, we see that all are not exercised with the same kind of cross. While the heavenly Physician treats some more gently, in the case of others He employs harsher remedies, His purpose being to provide a cure for all. Still, none is left free and untouched because He knows that all—without a single exception—are diseased.

**VIII. 6.** We may add that our most merciful Father requires not only to prevent our weakness, but often to correct our past fault, that He may keep us in due obedience. Therefore, whenever we are afflicted we ought immediately to call to mind our past life. In this way, we will find that the faults that we have committed are deserving of such castigation.<sup>69</sup> Yet the exhortation to patience is not to be founded chiefly on the acknowledgment of sin. For Scripture supplies a far better consideration when it says that in adversity, “We are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world” (1Co 11:32). Therefore, in the very bitterness of tribulation we ought to recognize the kindness and mercy of our Father, since even then He ceases not to further our salvation. For He afflicts [us] not that He may ruin or destroy, but rather that He may deliver us from the condemnation of the world. Let this thought lead us to what Scripture elsewhere teaches: “My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction: For whom the Lord loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth” (Pro 3:11-12). When we perceive our Father’s rod, is it not our part to behave as obedient, docile<sup>70</sup> sons rather than rebelliously imitate desperate men, who are hardened in wickedness? God dooms us to

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<sup>66</sup> **Lucius Annaeus Seneca** (4 BC – 65AD) – Roman Stoic philosopher, statesman, dramatist, and in one work, humorist; tutor and later advisor to the Roman emperor Nero.

<sup>67</sup> **refractory** – unmanageable; stubborn.

<sup>68</sup> **hack and manger** – in comfortable circumstance; in plenty.

<sup>69</sup> **castigation** – chastening; corrective punishment.

<sup>70</sup> **docile** – teachable; willing to learn.

destruction if He does not by correction call us back when we have fallen off from Him—so that it is truly said, “If ye be without chastisement...then are ye bastards, and not sons” (Heb 12:8).

We are most perverse, then, if we cannot bear Him while He is manifesting His good will to us and the care that He takes of our salvation. Scripture states the difference between believers and unbelievers to be that the latter, as the slaves of inveterate<sup>71</sup> and deep-seated iniquity, only become worse and more obstinate under the lash. The former, like freeborn sons, turn to repentance. Now, therefore, choose your class. But as I have already spoken of this subject, it is sufficient to have here briefly adverted<sup>72</sup> to it.

**VIII. 7.** There is singular consolation, moreover, when we are persecuted for righteousness’ sake. For our thought should then be on how much honor God bestows upon us in distinguishing us by the special badge of His soldiers. By suffering persecution for righteousness’ sake, I mean not only striving for the defense of the Gospel, but for the defense of righteousness in any way. Therefore, whether in maintaining the truth of God against the lies of Satan or defending the good and innocent against the injuries of the bad, we are obliged to incur the offence and hatred of the world, so as to endanger life, fortune, or honor. Let us not grieve or decline so far to spend ourselves for God; let us not think ourselves wretched in those things in which He with His own lips has pronounced us blessed (Mat 5:10). Poverty, indeed considered in itself, is misery; so is exile, contempt, imprisonment, ignominy.<sup>73</sup> Finally, death itself is the last of all calamities. But when the favor of God breathes upon us, there is none of these things that may not turn out to our happiness. Let us then be contented with the testimony of Christ rather than with the false estimate of the flesh, and then, after the example of the Apostles, we will rejoice in being “counted worthy to suffer shame for his name” (Act 5:41). For why? If, while conscious of our innocence, we are deprived of our substance by the wickedness of man, we are no doubt reduced to poverty, humanly speaking; but in truth, our riches in heaven are increased. If driven from our homes, we have a more welcome reception into the family of God; if vexed and despised, we are more firmly rooted in Christ; if stigmatized by disgrace and ignominy, we have a higher place in the kingdom of God; and if we are slain, entrance is thereby given us to eternal life. The Lord having set such a price upon us, let us be ashamed to estimate ourselves at less than the shadowy and evanescent<sup>74</sup> allurements of the present life.

From *Calvin on Self-denial*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

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**John Calvin (1509-1564):** French preacher, theologian, Reformer; father of Reformed and Presbyterian theology; born in Noyon, Picardie, France.



## FAMILY OR CHRIST?

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

*“If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife,  
and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also,  
he cannot be my disciple.”—Luke 14:26*

**J**ESUS Christ knew that the persons to whom He spoke would not be able to bear the tests that awaited His disciples. They did not know that He would be crucified, for just then He was popular; and they hoped that He was to be the King of Israel. But the Savior knew that there would come dark days in which the King of the Jews would be hanged upon a [cross], and His disciples, even His true ones, would forsake Him for the moment and would flee. Therefore, He in effect said to them, “You must be prepared for cross-bearing; you must be pre-

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<sup>71</sup> **inveterate** – habitual.

<sup>72</sup> **adverted** – referred.

<sup>73</sup> **ignominy** – public disgrace; dishonor.

<sup>74</sup> **evanescent** – vanishing; passing away.

pared to follow Me amid derision and shame and reproach; and if you are not ready for this, your discipleship is a mistake." In their case, it did not stand the test; these people were nowhere when the time of trial came. And remember, dear friends, and I dwell with great emphasis upon this point, we want a religion that will abide the inspection of the great Judge at the Last Day...If our religion is to be weighed in the balances, and may perchance be found wanting, it is well for us to see to it and to know that it must be sincere, genuine, and costly if it is to pass that ordeal.

What, then, is the expense?...The answer is given by our Savior, not by me. I should not have dared to invent such tests as He has ordained. It is for me to be the echo of His voice and no more. What does He say? Why, first, that if you would be His and have His salvation, you must love Him beyond every other person in this world. Is not that the meaning of this expression, "If any man come to me and hate not his father and mother"? Dear names! Dear names! "Father and mother!" Lives there a man with soul so dead that he can pronounce either of these words without emotion, and especially the last—"mother"? Men and brethren, this is a dear and tender name to us, it touches a chord that thrills our being. Yet far more powerful is the name of Savior, *the name of Jesus*. Less loved must father and mother be than Jesus Christ. The Lord demands precedence also of the best beloved "wife." Here He touches another set of heartstrings. Dear is that word *wife*—partner of our being, comfort of our sorrow, delight of our eyes—"wife!" Yet, *Wife*, thou must not take the chief place, thou must sit at Jesus' feet, or else thou art an idol; and Jesus will not brook thy rivalry. And "children," the dear babes that nestle in the bosom, clamber to the knee, and pronounce the parent's name in accents of music—they must not be our chief love. They must not come in between the Savior and us. Nor for their sakes—to give them pleasure or to promote their worldly advantage—must we grieve our Lord...If they tempt us to evil, they must be treated as if we hated them! Yea, the evil in them must be hated for Christ's sake. If ye be Christ's disciples, your Lord must be *first*, then father, mother, wife, children, brethren, and sisters will follow in due rank and order.

I am afraid that many professors are not prepared for this. They would be Christians if their family would approve, but they must consult their brother, father, or wife. They would make a stand against worldly pleasures if others would, but they cannot bear to appear [peculiar] or to oppose the views of relatives. They say, "My father wishes it, and I dare not tell him that it is wrong." "My mother says that we must not be too strait-laced, and therefore, though my conscience tells me it is wrong, yet will I do it." Or else they say, "My girls are growing up and must have amusement, and my boys must be allowed their pleasures. Therefore, I must wink at sin." Ah, my brethren, this must not be if you are indeed Christ's disciples. You must put them all aside; the dearest must go sooner than Jesus be forsaken. For does He not say in the Psalms, "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house; So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: for he *is* thy Lord; and worship thou him" (Psa 45:10)? Mark you, you will best prove your love to your relatives by being decided for the right, since you will be the more likely to win their souls. Love them too much to indulge the wrong in them; love them so truly that you hate *in* them that [which] would injure you and ruin them. You must be prepared to suffer from those who are bound to you by the dearest ties...We cannot yield in the point of sin, our determination is invincible: come hate or come love, *we must follow Christ*.

From a sermon delivered on Lord's Day morning, February 22, 1874,  
at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington.

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**Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892):** Influential English Baptist; history's most widely read preacher; born at Kelvedon, Essex, England.



# REASONS FOR SELF-DENIAL

Thomas Manton (1620-1677)

**I** come to handle some reasons with the most effectual enforcements. It is the duty of all that would be Christ's disciples to deny themselves; I shall prove it by several grounds.

**1. We cannot else be conformed to our great Master.** Jesus Christ came from heaven on purpose to teach us the lesson of self-denial: His birth, His life, His death was a pattern of self-denial. His birth—it was a great step from God's bosom into the virgin's lap, a great condescension: "Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (2Co 8:9). None can deny themselves so much as Christ did because none was so rich as He. We may talk of flocks and herds and the poor ornaments and supplies of a frail life; but He had the possession of a perfect happiness and glory in the divine nature: He was rich indeed. He needed not to have the respect of the creature to make Him [happier]: He was the Lord of glory and Heir of all things. Yet when He was thus rich, He made Himself poor. Not only did He subject Himself to the Law and [the] abject<sup>75</sup> condition of the creature, but came in a poor, mean<sup>76</sup> way, not in pomp, not in a princely equipage.<sup>77</sup>

As soon as He took our nature, He would have a feeling of our wants and miseries; [He] was therefore born in a mean, obscure way. Born of a poor mother in a poor place, wrapped up in cheap and unworthy swaddling clothes, the fellow of God, the Heir of all things, the Lord of angels, He is thrust out among beasts in a stable. Christ would not come in pomp, but with slender provision and furniture, to put a disgrace upon worldly greatness and bravery. He would overturn the idol of the world, not only by power, but by the choice of His life. And as His birth, so was His life; He was exercised with sorrows and labors. Christ was not a man of pleasure, but a man of sorrow. The apostle saith, "Christ pleased not himself" (Rom 15:3)—neither in the choice of His own life nor in any delights that He could propose to Himself of His own profit and advantage. He was happy enough without them, [even] so in His death. If any had reason or cause to love his natural life, Jesus Christ had. His soul dwelt with God in such a fellowship as we are not capable of. Yet He gave up Himself to redeem us from the present world (Gal 1:4). It is but ridiculous to profess Jesus Christ to be our Master, and not to conform to His example. We have no reason to be more tender and delicate of our interest than Christ was. What is *our* self to *Christ's* self? We are poor creatures under a law; Christ was God over all, blessed forever (Rom 9:5). The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord—"It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more *shall they call* them of his household?" (Mat 10:25). We should not murmur: we cannot be worse used than Christ was. We have no cause to complain if we be reduced to a coarse robe when we remember Christ's swaddling clothes, [or] to complain of a hard bed or prison when Christ was laid in a manger. Certainly, an innocent poverty is more comfortable than all the pomp in the world if we would but choose what Christ chose. Christ was a pattern of suffering from the cradle to the cross. They that caress themselves in all the delights of the world seem to profess another master than Christ...

**2. This hath been practiced, not only by the Master, but by all the fellows in the same school.** Christ set the first copy, and all the saints have written after it—some better, some worse: "For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord" (Rom 14:7). In the context, the apostle speaks of the difference of weak and strong believers; some weak, some strong, but they all agree in this: none of us, not one that hath given up his name to Christ, is allowedly a self-seeker; none live to themselves. The example of the saints is to be considered, lest we should think it exceeds the capacity of the creature, and that only Christ could practice it. We find the children of God—those among them that have made the highest progress in Christ's school—have had lowest thoughts of self. Paul was a glorious apostle, yet he saith in one place that he was the greatest of sinners (1Ti 1:15), and in another place that he was

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<sup>75</sup> **abject** – low; degraded.

<sup>76</sup> **mean** – low; unadorned.

<sup>77</sup> **equipage** – attire; clothing.

“less than the least of all saints” (Eph 3:8). A man would have thought that Paul, with more congruity<sup>78</sup> of speech, might have said, “The greatest of saints and least of sinners,” but he saith, “The greatest of sinners, and the least of saints”—not to lessen grace, but still to lessen self and put a disgrace upon it.

They that are the best scholars in this school most abhor self-conceit and self-seeking. As the laden boughs hang the head and bend downward, so do the children of God that have been most fruitful in the Christian course. As the sun doth cast the least shadows the higher it is, so for self-seeking...

**3. Jesus Christ may justly require it: all the idols of the world expect it from their votaries.**<sup>79</sup> In nature, we are sensible that all respects to divine powers are commended by self-denial. We see it in pagans: when Baal was silent, his priests gashed themselves (1Ki 18:28). They cut themselves after their manner with knives and lances, so that the blood gushed out. To gratify their idol, they would not spare their own blood! So those hypocrites—see how liberal they are: “Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, *or* with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give...the fruit of my body *for* the sin of my soul?” (Mic 6:6-8). They thought it was not self-denial enough to part with a beast in sacrifice; they devised something more costly: all their flocks and herds, their children, the fruit of their womb, their whole substance...And we fatten and feed ourselves and cannot deny ourselves for Christ.

See the instance<sup>80</sup> in spiritual idols: how worldly and carnal men can deny themselves to compass their ends.<sup>81</sup> They rise early, go to bed late, eat the bread of sorrow (Psa 127:2). They can deny themselves sleep, food, and rest—all in a devotion to worldly interests. He bereaves his soul of all good (Ecc 4:8). There is no end of their toil; with an unwearied patience, they lay out their strength in vain pursuits. Many a covetous man doth shame many a godly man. Religion<sup>82</sup> is a better thing: shall lust do more with them than the love of Christ with thee? Lust that will make a man labor in the very fire, though it be but for a thing of naught, to deny himself of the necessary support and conveniences of life. Consider the tyranny of worldly affection. Certainly we should have a stronger impulse, for we have a better reward! We are [moved to action] with a more mighty Spirit...

**4. Because self is the greatest enemy both to God and man.** (1) *It robs God of His honor.* Self—it is a near and dear word to man. It is both the idol and the idolater. It receives the worship that it performeth, as the sea sends out waves to the shore and then sucks them in again. Self is made a god, and then [that] god is made an idol, “whose God *is* their belly” (Phi 3:19). All their toil and labor is to feed and delight themselves and to exalt themselves. *Self* hath such sacrifices and devotions as God requires. *Self* hath solemn worship. A carnal man prays, and what then? He makes God the object and self the end, so that self is the god. So self hath private and closet duties, vain thoughts and musings, in which we lift up ourselves in our own conceit—“Is not this great Babylon, that I have built?” (Dan 4:30). Some time of the day, we consecrate to the great idol self, to puff up ourselves with the conceit of our own worth. This is a more secret worship of self. The public worship of self is in self-seeking and the private in self-conceit, when we feast and entertain our spirits with whispers of vanity and suppositions of our own excellency and greatness.

(2) *As it is God's, so it is man's enemy.* Self parts itself against itself and is its own greatest enemy. Not only they of a man's own house are his enemies, as Christ speaks (Mat 10:36), but his own heart is his enemy! Self-will, self-wit are the greatest foes you have in the world...A man need fear and suspect no creature in the world so much as himself, and that when we most respect self. The world and the devil may trouble thee, but cannot hurt thee without thyself. No enemy can hurt us so much as we hurt ourselves! Therefore, if we would take revenge of them that hate us most, we should begin with our own hearts. Men trust their hearts as their best friends, and so they are deceived. It is the greatest judgment that God can lay upon any creature to give him up to himself: “So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: *and* they walked in their own counsels” (Psa 81:12). Oh! It is a sad doom to be given up to self. On the other side, it is the greatest conquest that can be to conquer self: it is an enemy that will hardly be subdued. “*He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city*” (Pro 16:32), *i.e.*, he that is able to conquer the masterless<sup>83</sup> bosom enemy—*self*—that is so apt to betray us.

**5. Because those that are Christ's disciples are not their own men.** We are not our own, but the Lord's (Rom 14:8). Our will should not be our own law, nor our profit our aim because we are not our own. There are many

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<sup>78</sup> **congruity** – agreement with what is reasonable.

<sup>79</sup> **votaries** – devout worshippers.

<sup>80</sup> **instance** – example.

<sup>81</sup> **compass their ends** – achieve their objectives.

<sup>82</sup> **religion** – the Reformed faith; Protestantism.

<sup>83</sup> **masterless** – having no lord or master; ungovernable.

relations between us and Christ that take away all the property we have in ourselves. We cannot say that our tongues are our own to speak what we please, nor our works our own, nor our interests our own. No, thy tongue when thou speakest—it is not thine, but Christ’s! And so thy estate when thou tradest—remember it is not thine, but Christ’s. Thy prayer, thy public service—they are not thine, but Christ’s. Remember, thy strength is not thine own when thou art wasting it in lust and vanity; it is not thine, but Christ’s...

**6. Because it is the most gainful project in the world, we must therefore deny self.** Self-denial is the true way of self-advancing. Leave as much as you can for Christ, you will lose nothing—“He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it” (Mat 10:39). Jesus answered and said, “Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel’s, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life” (Mar 10:29-30). Though we have it not in specie,<sup>84</sup> in kind, we shall have it over and above in value...Here we have peace of conscience, and hereafter life eternal...Every man’s mind, his soul, is himself: to lose his soul is indeed to lose himself; and when we lose ourselves, we lose all. When a man hath most need, riches fly away: you cannot bribe divine justice nor keep the soul from hell. Therefore, if you would seek yourselves indeed, *seek yourselves in God*.

**7. Because otherwise a man can be nothing in religion, neither do nor suffer; therefore we must resolve either to deny ourselves or to deny Christ.** Before we go out of the world, we shall be put upon the trial. Peter denied his Master because he could not deny himself. All duties in religion put us upon self-denial—private duties upon the denial of lusts, and public upon the denial of interests; therefore we read of “denying ungodliness and worldly lusts” (Ti 2:12). In *private* duties: whenever you go to pray, private duties are contrary to the inclinations and dispositions of the heart, which are for ease, pleasure, and the gratifications of the flesh. If thou hast no self-denial, *thou wilt never bring thy heart to God in them*. Then in *public* duties, we must look for opposition. Advancers of public good are usually exposed to public hatred...When the devil cannot prevail with instruments to slacken the work of God, then he stirs up the world against it...Therefore, whosoever would be a disciple to God and Christ, this is his first lesson; this is the A B C of religion. We shall never digest the inconveniences of a spiritual life until we resolve upon it...Therefore, put your life in your hand, and resolve to follow Christ wheresoever He goeth.

**8. Everyone must deny himself because it is a special part of faith.** Faith looks upon God’s mercy in Christ, not only as true, but as good—better than life and better than all the contentments of it, else it is not faith: “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation” (1Ti 1:15)...Faith is an inclination of the soul to true worth; and therefore, with a resting upon the mercies of Christ, there is a renouncing of interest. The merchant that found the rich pearl “went and sold all that he had, and bought it” (Mat 13:46). This is faith: to come and traffic with God for His mercy in Christ, to part with all—whatever is pleasant and profitable in the world—rather than be deprived of His grace! “If any *man* come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple” (Luk 14:26).

Then our Lord brings the similitude<sup>85</sup> of a man that goes about to build, and sits him down and counts the charge. In faith, there is a sitting down and accounting the charges, or considering what it is to take Christ...The great difficulty lies in self-denial. As Christ put the young man in Matthew 19:21 upon the trial, “Canst thou leave all and follow me?” so we are to put ourselves upon the trial. Otherwise, our application to God’s mercy and settling our particular persuasion will be but a rash confidence. Every one hath some tender parts; and usually at first conviction, our tender parts are touched. When God begins to work upon the heart, we should say, “Soul, thou hath busied thyself in a wrong way. There is one thing necessary: come out of that way, or thou shalt never be happy.”

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**Thomas Manton (1620-1677):** Nonconformist Puritan preacher; born in Lawrence-Lydiat, Somerset, England.



The pleasures of sin are only for a season, but the pleasures and gains of self-denial are eternal.—*Arthur W. Pink*

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<sup>84</sup> **specie** – coined money.

<sup>85</sup> **similitude** – parable.

# MOTIVES TO SELF-DENIAL

George Whitefield (1714-1770)

**P**ROCEED we therefore now to...offer some considerations, which may serve as so many motives to reconcile us to, and quicken us in, the practice of this duty of self-denial.

**1. The first means I shall recommend to you, in order to reconcile you to this doctrine, is to meditate frequently on the life of our blessed Lord and Master Jesus Christ.** Follow Him from His cradle to the cross, and see what a self-denying life He led! Shall we not drink of the cup that He drank of and be baptized with the baptism that He was baptized with? Or think we that Jesus Christ did and suffered everything in order to have us excused and exempted from sufferings? No, far be it from any sincere Christian to judge after this manner: for St. Peter tells us, “Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps” (1Pe 2:21). Had Christ, indeed, like those that sat in Moses’ chair, laid heavy burdens of self-denial upon us, (supposing they were heavy, which they are not) and refused to touch them Himself with one of His fingers, we might have had some pretense to complain. But since He has enjoined us nothing but what He first put in practice Himself, thou art inexcusable, O disciple, whoever thou art, who wouldst be above thy persecuted self-denying Master. And thou art no good and faithful servant, who art unwilling to suffer and sympathize with thy mortified, heavenly-minded Lord.

**2. Next to the pattern of our blessed Master, think often on the lives of the glorious company of the apostles, the goodly fellowship of the prophets, and the noble army of martyrs.** [They,] by a constant looking to the Author and Finisher of our faith, have fought the good fight and are gone before us to inherit the promises. View again and again how holily, how self-denyingly, how unblameably they lived: if self-denial was necessary for them, why not for us also? Are we not men of like passions with them? Do we not live in the same wicked world as they did? Have we not the same good Spirit to assist, support, and purify us as they had? Is not the same eternal inheritance [extended] to us as was to them? And if we have the same nature to change, the same wicked world to withstand, the same good Spirit to help, and the same eternal crown at the end, why should we not lead the same lives as they did?...

**3. Thirdly, think often on the pains of hell.** Consider whether it is not better to cut off a right hand or foot and pull out a right eye if they offend us (or cause us to sin), rather than to be cast into hell, “where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched” (Mar 9:44). Think how many thousands there are now reserved with damned spirits in chains of darkness unto the judgment of the Great Day! Think withal that this, this must be our case shortly unless we are wise in time, deny ourselves, and follow Jesus Christ! Think you [that] they now imagine Jesus Christ to be a hard master; or rather think you not [that] they would give ten thousand times ten thousand worlds, could they but return to life again and take Christ’s easy yoke upon them? And can we dwell with everlasting burnings more than they? No, if we cannot bear this precept—deny yourselves, take up your crosses—how shall we bear the irrevocable sentence, “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” (Mat 25:41)? But I hope those, amongst whom I am now preaching the kingdom of God, are not so disingenuous as to need to be driven to their duty by the terrors of the Lord, but rather desire to be drawn by the cords of love.

**4. Lastly, therefore, often meditate on the joys of heaven.** Think, think with what unspeakable glory those happy souls are now encircled, who when on earth were called to deny themselves as well as we, and were not disobedient to that call! Lift up your hearts frequently towards the mansions of eternal bliss, and with an eye of faith, like Stephen, see the heavens opened and the Son of man with His glorious retinue of departed saints, sitting and solacing themselves in eternal joys. Hark! Methinks I hear them chanting forth their everlasting Hallelujahs, and echoing triumphant songs of joy. And do you not long, my brethren, to join this heavenly choir? Do not your hearts burn within you? As the hart panteth after the water brooks, do not your souls so long after the blessed company of these sons of God? Behold, then, a heavenly ladder reached down to you by which you may climb to this holy hill. Let us believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and deny ourselves!

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**George Whitefield (1714-1770):** Anglican preacher and evangelist, greatly used of God in the Great Awakening; born in Gloucester, England.