

In What Respects Self Must Be Denied

A Sermon by Richard Baxter

And here I beseech you take heed of Self in all these following respects. 1. You must Deny Self as it is Opposite to God, and a Competitor with him, and the Idol of the soul and of the world; and this is in all the ten respects which I mentioned in the beginning, and therefore shall not now rehearse. And this is the principal part of self-denial.

2. Self must be denied as it is but conceived as separated from God; and would be an End in a divided sense from God. For ourselves and all things else are created contingent, dependent beings, and must not be once thought of as if we were either our own beginning, or end, or in any capacity, but subservient unto God. Self becomes a Satan, when it would cast off its due subordination to God, and would be any other than the workmanship of God, depending on him, and ruled by him, and living to him, loving him, desiring him, and seeking after him, and either mourning when we miss him, or rejoicing when we find Communion with him.

3. Self must be denied as it stands up against the Truth of the Gospel, and blindly and proudly quarrelleth with that word which faith relyeth upon for Justification and salvation. Carnal self is both the most incompetent Judge of the word of God, and of spiritual affairs, and also the most forward, and arrogant, and audacious, for all it is so incompetent. And this is the damnable fountain of unbelief. That self is an incompetent Judge of the word and ways of God, is evident for:

(1.) It is a natural enemy to them, and an enemy is no competent Judge, Rom. 8. 7. [Because the Carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the Law of God, neither indeed can be.] Deny therefore this enemy the power of judging the word of God. Ill-will never saith well. Enmity is credulous of all evil, and overlooks the good, and is accompanied with false surmises, and wresteth every word, and suspecteth or maketh an evil sense where there was none: there is not a worse expositor in the world. And therefore no wonder if such a

nature of enmity can find matter of quarrel with the very Scripture itself, and with an holy life, yea with God himself; for it is him especially that the enmity is against.

(2.) Moreover self is a party, and therefore an incompetent judge. It is self that the Scripture principally speaks against: All over the Gospel there are the words of disgrace, and the arrows of death directed against the very heart of Carnal self. God there proclaimeth and manageth an open war against it. And shall a party be the judge? shall the traitorous delinquent be the judge? A child will hardly speak well of the rod, whatever he does by the Corrector: but it's not to be expected that a thief should love the halter or the gallows. God's word is the weapon that self must be slain by; and therefore self is an incompetent judge of it.

(3.) Moreover self is quite blind in the matters of God: the natural man discerneth them not, nor can do, because they are spiritually discerned, 1 Cor. 2. 14. And the ignorant and blind are incompetent judges.

(4.) And the selfish man is no good student in the Laws of God; even when he readeth the letter, he doth not mind or savour the spirit of them. Rom. 8. 5. [For they that are after the flesh, do mind the things of the flesh: but they that are after the spirit, the things of the spirit.] A fair world it would be, if every Collier should judge the Privy Council and the Judges of the Land! or if every thief should sit upon his accuser and his Judge, and every traitor should judge the Prince. And a thousand-fold more insufficient is self to judge the Word of God.

And yet as insufficient as it is, it is exceeding arrogant, and steps up into the judgment-seat, at every Chapter that is read or heard: and if this blind and malicious Judge be unsatisfied, forsooth the Scripture must be dark or contradictory, or what he pleases. This horrible presumptuous arrogance of self is it that hath opened so many mouths against the blessed Doctrine of Salvation, and made so many wretched Apostates in the world, and cast so many others into doubting of that word by which at last they must be judged, and which should have been the ground of their faith and hope.

4. Moreover, self must be denied as it stands up against the Lord Jesus Christ. When Christ is presented in his wonderful Condescension, in his Incarnation, and mean despised life, and in his ignominious death, Proud self is offended at so low a Saviour, and disdaineth that Humiliation which his own necessities did require, and despiseth Christ because he became despised and a man of sorrows in our stead. When he is propounded as the remedy of a miserable soul, and as our only Life, and Righteousness, and Hope, Self doth seduce the soul to undervalue him: It will not easily be convinced of so much misery as to need such a remedy: it is too well to value such a Physician: it is too righteous to value the righteousness of a Mediator. It hath too much Life and Hope at home, in its own supposed innocence or sufficiency, to set much by the Hopes that Christ hath purchased, and to Live in him.

O down with self that Christ may be Christ to you. How shall he come in, while Self is the Porter that keeps the door? How shall he pardon you, when Self will not suffer you to feel the want and worth of pardon? How shall he bind up your hearts, when Self will not suffer them to be broken? How shall he clothe you with his righteousness, while self keeps on your own defiled rotten rags? Down therefore with self, that Christ may be exalted. Away with your own conceited righteousness, that he may be your righteousness; down with your Selfish foolish wisdom, that the supposed foolishness of God may be your wisdom. Level this mountain, which Satan hath built up in enmity against the holy mountain of the Lord.

5. Moreover, Self must be denied as it is the great resister of the Holy Ghost. The sanctifying spirit hath no greater enemy, at least, except the Devil himself. One half of the work of sanctification, is to destroy this Carnal self. And therefore no wonder if hence it find the chief resistance. Not a holy motion can be made to the soul but self is against it. No work hath the spirit to do upon us, but self is ready to gainsay it, and contradict it, and work against it: whenever therefore this mortal Principle is contending against the spirit of God, dishonouring holiness, dissuading you from duty, persuading you to sin, down with it and deny it, as you would be true to the spirit and your selves.

6. Moreover, self must be denied as it traitorously complyeth with the enemies of Christ and your own salvation: when it takes part with Satan, and pleads for sin, and saith as wicked

men say, and entereth a conspiracy with all that would undo you, and all this under pretence of your own good.

Whenever it speaks for sin, you may be sure it speaks against God and you, and therefore it's reason you should deny it. Self also must be denied when it riseth up against the supposed tediousness or difficulty of duty: when it grudgeth at a holy life, & saith, [What a stir is here? what a weary life is this? what do I get by serving God?] Now self is playing the traitor against God and you; and therefore deny it.

7. Moreover, when self doth rise up against sufferings, and make you believe that they are intolerable; and that it is unreasonable for a man to forsake all that he hath for fear of a sinful word or deed, when we sin every day, when we have done our best; it's time now to stop the mouth of self; for it plays the Devils game against God and you, and would persuade you to prefer a short, uncertain, miserable life, before eternal life, and to give up yourself to wilful sin, because God beareth with the sins of men's infirmity. It's reason that you should deny so unreasonable an enemy to God & you.

8. Moreover, self must be denied when it stands up against the Ordinances of God. When it pleadeth against the arguments of the word, and findeth fault with the Law that it should obey, and quarrelleth with prayer and all holy duties, and would make all instituted means ineffectual for your saving good; it's time now that you deny it.

9. When self doth rise up against the Officers of Christ, and would make you believe your teachers fools, and you are wise; that they are beside the truth, and you are in the right; or that they speak against you out of malice or singularity, or some such distemper, and so would deprive you of the saving benefit of their Doctrine and Office, it's time now to deny self, if you know but what belongeth to your peace. And though I grant that you must not follow a Teacher into a certain sin and error; yet when it is not God but self that riseth up against your Teachers, and possesseth you with a spirit of bitterness, disobedience, contradiction and malignity, this self must be denied.

10. Lastly, as self is against the good of our neighbour or humane Societies, it must be denied. For we must love our Neighbour as our selves: that is, both self and neighbour must

be loved in a due subordination to God, as means to his Glory, and in this notion of a means, the Love should be equal; though there is also a Natural Love in order to self-preservation put into us by the Creator, which our Love to every Neighbour is not to equal in degree; yet our love to Societies should exceed it; and our Love to a Neighbour should come so near it, that we should diligere proximum proxima delictione, love him as a second self, and so study his welfare, as to promote it to our power, and not to covet or draw from him for ourselves, nor do him any wrong. This is the sense of the tenth Commandment, and sum of the second Table.