

Quotes on Self-denial

by

Richard Baxter

You that draw back from painful, displeasing, suffering duties, and put off men's souls with ineffectual formalities do you think this is honourable treatment of Christ's spouse? Are the souls of men thought meet by God to see his face, and live for ever in heaven, and are they not worthy of your utmost cost and labour on earth? Do you think so basely of the Church of God, as if it deserved not the best of your care and help?

He that cannot deny himself a delicious cup or morsel would ill deny himself a Kingdom if it were made the bait of sin. He that will not displease his appetite in so small a matter, would clearly leave his estate, or liberty, or life, if he were put to it, either to sin, or leave them. As he is a faithful servant to God indeed, that will not displease him in the smallest matter; so he is most fully obedient to the flesh that cannot deny it the least thing that it desireth.... He sets little by Heaven or the favour of God that will venture it for so small a thing.

Can slothful servants expect a good reward?

How excellent (but too rare) is the true self-denial and charity of the Christian; who hath quit all pretence of Title to himself, or anything that he hath, and hath consecrated himself and all to God; resolving to employ himself and it entirely for him; studying only to be well informed, which way it is that God would have him lay it out. And among these Saints themselves, how rare is that excellent man, that is Covetous and Laborious for God, and for the Church, and for his Brethren: And that doth as providently get and keep, and as Painfully Labour, (how rich so ever he be) and as much pinch his flesh (in prudent moderation) that he may have the more to Give and to do good with, and make the best of his Masters stock; as other men do in making Provision for the flesh, and laying up for their posterity.

The greatest enemy to man is himself; and the greatest judgment in this life, that can befall him, is to be left to himself; that the great work that grace hath to do, is to save us from ourselves; that the greatest accusations and complaints of men should be against

themselves; that the greatest work that we have to do ourselves, is to resist ourselves; and the greatest enemy that we should daily pray, and watch, and strive against, is our own carnal hearts and wills; and the greatest part of your work, if you will do good to others, and help them to heaven, is to save them from themselves, even from their blind understandings, and corrupted wills, and perverse affections, and violent passions, and unruly senses.

It is your duty even to pinch your flesh, and spare it from your back and belly, that you may have wherewithal to do good. It's no thanks to you to relieve others out of that which you need not your selves: and to give God that which your flesh can spare. Such liberality may stand with little suffering or self-denial; and therefore will be but a poor proof of your grace. Had I ten thousand pound a year, I should think it my duty for all that, to pinch my flesh, that I might spare as much of it as is possible for God. *David* would not offer that to God which cost him nothing, *2 Sam. 24. 24.* If you fare the hardliner, and go the plainer in your attire, and deny yourselves that which is for any needless pomp or ostentation, or splendour in the world; that you may have so much the more to do good with; you deal then like good husbands for God and your souls, and faithful Stewards.

Cast out this wickedness (*the love of the world and the pleasures thereof*), and cherish it no longer: Bring forth that Traitor that hath dethroned God in your hearts and exalted itself, and let it die the death... It is a murderer of your own souls... It is a liar that promiseth what it cannot perform: It is a cheater that would deceive you of your everlasting happiness; and tice you into Hell, by pretences of furthering your profit and contents... It adulterously seeketh to vitiate the spouse of Christ, and take up the heart which was reserved for himself: It robbeth him of his honour, of our affections and obedience; and Sacrilegiously defaceth the Temple of the Holy Ghost: It will not allow God one free thought, nor full affection of your heart, nor one hour entirely improved for his honour. This is the World; and thus is it used by sensual men. Judge now whether it deserves not to die the death; and to be cast out of your souls!

With this sinful inclination are we all born into the world; so that every man according to his corrupted nature doth terminate all his desires in himself: and whatever he may notionally

be convinced of to the contrary, yet practically he makes his earthly life and the advancement and pleasure which he expecteth therein, to be his felicity and end. Self-denial now is the cure of this: It carryeth a man from himself again, and showeth him that he was never made to be his own felicity or end; and that the flesh was not made to be pleased before God; and that it is so poor, and low, and short a felicity, as indeed is but a name and shadow of felicity, and when it pretends to that, a mere deceit.

The state of man's Apostasy is an adhesion to the creature, and a departure from God; and the state of his recovery must be a departing from the creature, and an adhering unto God... *As the creature would be man's felicity, or any part of his true felicity,* so is it to be hated, resisted and crucified.

Hear, all ye that are void of the love of God, whose hearts are not toward him, nor taken up with the hopes of glory, but set more by your earthly prosperity and delights than by the joys of heaven; all you that are religious but a little by the by, and give God no more than your flesh can spare; that have not denied your carnal selves, and forsaken all that you have for Christ, in the estimation and grounded resolution of your souls, but have some one thing in the world so dear to you that you cannot spare it for Christ, if he required it, but will rather venture on his displeasure than forsake it; "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?"

I know that flesh and blood will cavil before it will lose its prey, and will never want somewhat to say against this duty that is against its interest; but mark what I say (and the Lord set it home upon your hearts), that man who hath anything in the world so dear to him, that he cannot spare it for Christ, if he call for it, is no true Christian. And because a carnal heart will not believe that Christ calls for it when he cannot spare it, and, therefore, makes that his self-deceiving shift, I say further, that the man who will not be persuaded that duty is duty, because he cannot spare that for Christ which is therein to be expended, is no true Christian; for a false heart corrupteth the understanding, and that again increaseth the delusions of the heart. Do not take it, therefore, as an undoing, to make friends of the mammon of unrighteousness and to lay up treasure in heaven, though you leave yourselves but little on earth. You lose no great advantage for heaven, by becoming poor: 'In pursuing one's way, the lighter one travels the better.'

We and all that we have are God's, and should be employed to the utmost for his service? It is inhuman cruelty to let souls go to hell, for fear my wife and children should fare somewhat the harder, or live at lower rates.

Without self-denial there will never be true Reformation or Unity; neither sin nor division will ever be overcome... selfishness is so natural and common and obstinate, that so many men as are born into the world, so many enemies are there to Holiness and Peace, till grace in all change them; and that all endeavours, persuasions, convictions, do little prevail against this deadly rooted sin: so that men will preach against it, and yet most shamefully live in it; and after all rebukes, chastisements and heavy judgements of God, the Church is still bleeding, and Princes, Pastors and People are self-conceited, self-willed and self-seekers still.

All the sermons that we preach to persuade our people to work out their salvation with fear and trembling, to lay violent hands upon the crown of life, and take the kingdom by force, to strive to enter in at the strait gate, and so to run as to obtain, will rise up against the unfaithful and condemn them; for if it so nearly concern them to labour for their salvation, doth it not concern us who have the charge of them to be also violent, laborious, and unwearied in striving to help on their salvation? Is it worth their labour, and patience, and is it not also worth ours?

Will you stand by, and see sinners gasping under the pangs of death, and say, 'God doth not require me to make myself a drudge to save them?' Is this the voice of Christian or ministerial compassion? Or rather is it not the voice of sensual laziness and diabolical cruelty? Doth God set you work to do, and will you not believe that he would have you do it? Is this the voice of obedience, or of rebellion?