

What is Selfishness and Self-Denial

A Sermon by Richard Baxter

I have already spoken of Conversion in the foregoing Discourse, both opening to you the true nature of it, and the reasons of its necessity, and persuading men thereunto. But lest so great a work should miscarry with any for want of a more particular explication, I should next open the three great parts of the work distinctly and in order: that is, 1. From what it is that we must Turn: 2. To whom we must Turn: 3. And By whom we must Turn. For though I touched all these in the foregoing Directions, and through the discourse; yet I am afraid lest so brief a touch should be ineffectual.

The first of these I shall handle at this time from this Text, meddling with no more but what is necessary to our present business. You may easily perceive that the Doctrine which Christ here proclaimeth to all that have thoughts of being his followers, is this, that [All that will be Christians, must Deny themselves, and take up their Cross, and follow Christ, and not reserve so much as their very lives, but resolve to resign up all for him.]

Self-denial is one part of true Conversion: For the opening of this I must shew you; 1. What is meant by Self; and 2. What by Denying this Self: and 3. The Grounds and Reasons of the point: and 4. I shall briefly apply it.

I. Self, is sometime taken for the very person, consisting of soul and body simply considered: and this is called Natural or Personal Self. 2. Self is taken for this Person considered in its capacity of earthly comforts, and in relation to the present blessings of this world that tend to the prosperity of man as in the flesh: And this may be called Earthly Self (yet in an innocent sense.) 3. Self is taken for the Person as corrupted by inordinate sinful sensuality; which may be called Carnal Self. 4. Self may be taken for the Person in his sanctified estate; which is Spiritual Self. 5. And Self may be taken for the person in his Naturals and Spiritualls Conjoint, as he is capable of a Life of Everlasting Felicity; which is the Immortal Self.

II. By Denying Self, is meant disclaiming, renouncing, disowning, and forsaking it. Self is here looked on partly as a party distinct from Christ, and withdrawn from its due subordination to God, and partly as his Competitor and opposite: and accordingly it is to be denied, partly by a neglect, and partly by an opposition.

Before I come to tell you how far self must be denied, I must tell you wherein the disease of selfishness doth consist; and for brevity we shall dispatch them both together. And on the Negative, 1. To be a natural Individual person distinct from God our Creator is none of our disease, but the state which we were created in. And therefore no man must under pretence of self-denial either destroy himself, or yet with some Heretics aspire to be essentially and personally one with God, so that their individual personality should be drowned in him as a drop is in the Ocean.

2. The disease of selfishness lyeth not in having a Body that is capable of tasting sweetness in the Creature, or in having the Objects of our sense in which we be delighted, nor yet in all actual sweetness and delight in them; nor in a simple love of life itself: For all these are the effects of the Creators Will. And therefore this self-denial doth not consist in a hatred or disregard of our own lives; or in a destruction of our appetites or senses, or an absolute refusal to please them in the use of the Creatures, which God hath given us.

3. Yea though our Natures are corrupted by sin, self-denial requireth not that we should kill ourselves, and destroy our humane natures that we may thereby destroy the sin. Self-murder is a most heinous sin, which God condemneth.

4. Our spiritual self, or self as sanctified must not be so denied, as to deny ourselves to be what we are, or have what we have, or do what we do: we may not deny Gods Graces; nor deny that they are in us as the subject, nor may we restrain the holy desires which God exciteth in us; or deny to fulfil them, or bring them towards fruition, when opportunity is offered us.

5. We may not deny to accept of any mercy which God shall offer us, though but a common

Creature: nor to use any talent for his service if he choose us for his stewards; much less may we refuse any spiritual mercy, that may further our Salvation: It is not the self-denial required by Christ, that we deny to be Christians, or to be sanctified by the spirit, or to be delivered from our sins and enemies; or that we deny to use the means and helps that are offered us, or to accept of the privileges purchased by Christ: Much less to deny our salvation itself, and to undo our own souls. In a word, it is not anything that is really and finally to our hurt or loss.

But (as to the Affirmative) I shall shew 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 of soul, which might incline him to his Maker as his only Felicity and Ultimate End. He made him to be blessed in the sight of his Glory, and in the everlasting Love of God, and delight in him, and praises of him. This excellent employment and glory did God both fit him for, and set before him.

But the first temptation did entice him 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. And thus man was suddenly taken with the Creature as a means to the pleasing of his carnal self, and so did depart from God his true felicity; and 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 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. It showeth him

how unreasonable, how impious and unjust it is, that a Creature and such a Creature, should terminate his desires and intentions in himself: And this is the principal part of self-denial.

2. As God was man's ultimate End in his state of innocence, so accordingly man was appointed to use all Creatures in order to God, for his Pleasure and Glory. So that it was the work of man to do his Makers 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; and all that he possessed was become the provision and fuel of his lusts; and so the whole creation which 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; so that all that he hath and useth in the world, is used to another end (so far as he denyeth himself) than formerly it was; even for God and not himself.

In the state of Innocence, though man had naturally an averseness from death and bodily pains, as being natural evils, and had a desire of the welfare even of the flesh itself; yet as his body was subject to his soul, and his senses to his Reason, so his bodily ease and welfare was to be esteemed and desired and sought, but in a due subordination to his spiritual welfare, and especially to his Makers 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. So that he preferreth it before the Pleasing of God and everlasting life: And 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, as that all things else are made but

subordinate to them, and swallowed up in this gulf: even God himself is so far loved as he befriendeth these our carnal ends, and furthereth our earthly prosperity and life.

But when men are brought to deny themselves, they are in their measures 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; and so to hold them and seek their preservation as to resign them to the will of God, and to lay them down when we cannot hold them with his Love, and to choose death in order to life everlasting, before that life which would deprive us of it. And this is the principal instance of self-denial which Christ giveth us here in the Text, as it is recited by all the three Evangelists that recite these words, [He that saveth his life shall lose it, &c. And what shall it profit a man to win all the world and lose his soul?] 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 Content 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 yet so to prefer the Love and Will of God, as to be able to sacrifice his Son at Gods Command.

And the Lord Jesus himself was the liveliest Pattern to us of his Self-denial that ever the world saw: Indeed his whole life was a continued practice of it. And it hath oft convinced me that it is a special part of our Sanctification, when I have considered how abundantly the Lord hath exercised himself in it for our example. For as it is desperate to think with the Socinians that he did it only for our Example; so it is also a desperate Error of others, to think that it was only for satisfaction to God, and not at all for our Example. Many do give up themselves to Flesh-pleasing, upon a mis-conceit that Christ did therefore deny his flesh, to purchase them a liberty to please theirs. As in his Fasting and Temptations, and his sufferings by the reproach and ingratitude of men, and the outward Poverty and Meanness of his condition, the Lord was pleased to deny himself; so especially in his last Passion and death. As I have shewed elsewhere, he loved his natural life and peace: and therefore in manifestation of that, he prayeth, Father, if it be thy Will, let this Cup pass from me: But yet when it came to the comparative practical Act, he proceeded to choose his Fathers Will with death, rather than life without it, and therefore saith, [Not my Will (that is, my simple love

of life) but thy Will be done.] In which very words he manifesteth another will of his own, besides that, which he consenteth shall not be done, and showeth that he preferred the pleasing of his Father in the Redemption of the world, before his own life. And thus in their measure he causeth all his Members to do: so that life, and all the comforts of life, are not so dear to them as the love of God and everlasting life.

4. When God had created man, he was presently the Owner of him, and man understood this that he was God's, and not his own. And he was not to claim Propriety in himself, nor to be affected to himself as his own, nor to live as his own, but as His that made him.

But when he fell from God, he arrogated practically (though notionally he may deny it) a propriety in himself, and useth himself accordingly.

And when Christ bringeth men to deny themselves, they cease to be their own in their conceits anymore; then they resign themselves wholly to God as being wholly his. They know they are his, both by the right of Creation and of Redemption: And therefore are to be disposed of by him, and to glorify him in body and spirit which are his, 1 Cor. 6. 19, 20. Rom. 14. 9. To be thus heartily devoted to God as his own, is the form of Sanctification; and to live as God's own, is the truly Holy life.

5. As man in Innocence did know that he was not his own; so he knew that nothing that he had was his own; but that 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: and 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, Psal. 12. 4. [Our lips are our own; who is Lord over us?] Though all of them know speculatively that all is Gods, 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 Gods; and 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 at the Apostles feet. And therefore he asketh God what he shall do with it, and how he shall use it; and if God take it from him, he can bless the name of the Lord with Job, Job 1. 21. as knowing he taketh but his own: and can say with Eli, It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good, 1 Sam. 3. 18. He knows that God may do with his own as he list. Mat. 20. 15. and that he can have nothing but of his bounty; and therefore that it is his Mercy that leaveth him anything; but it were no wrong to him if he took away all. And thus he understandeth that he is but a Steward, 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 have Wealth, or Honour, and Power among men, his care is to know which way he may employ them for his Masters 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, or the World, or fleshly Delights would draw him to lay them out for them, he remembers that this were to waste his Masters stock upon his enemies. So that though the sanctified man hath all things, yet he knows that he hath nothing. All things are his as Gods Steward: but nothing is properly and ultimately his own. All things are his for God; but nothing is his for his Carnal-self, nor ultimately for his personal or natural self. 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. Justice requireth that everyone have his own.] And thus Self-denial doth take off the sanctified from giving that which is God's unto themselves.

Object. But do we not lawfully use his Mercies for ourselves? Is not our Meat, and Drink, and Clothes, and Houses, and Goods our own, and may we not use them for ourselves?

Answ. Improperly they are our own: so far our own, as that our Fellow-servants may not take them from us without our Lords consent: as every servant may have a peculiar stock entrusted in his hands, or may have his tools to do his work with, which indeed are his Masters; but are his to use.

But as to a strict Propriety they are none of ours, but God is the only Proprietary of the world.

And for the use of them, it may be for ourselves in subordination to God, but never ultimately for ourselves. We may not use one Creature, but ultimately and principally for God. When we eat or drink, we must never make the pleasing of our Appetite our end, but must do it to strengthen, and cheer, and fit our selves for the service of God, and therefore we must first ask God, and not our Appetite, what, and how much we must eat and drink: And we must no further please our Appetite, than the pleasing of it doth fit us for the service of God. It is the express Command, 1 Cor. 10. 31 [Whether ye eat or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the Glory of God.] You may not wear your clothes merely and ultimately for your bodies, but only to fit your bodies for Gods service: and therefore you must advice with his Word, and with your end, what you should put on. You may not provide a house to dwell in, nor Friends, nor Riches, nor anything else for the pleasing of your flesh, as your ultimate end, but for the service of your Lord. For you must put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof, Rom. 13. 14.

6. As man had his Being and well-being from God, so is it God only that can preserve and continue them. Innocent man understood this, and therefore lived in a Dependence upon God; looking to his hand for the supply of his wants, and casting all his care upon him, and trusting him wholly with himself, and all, and not distracting his own mind with cares and distrustful fears, but quieted and contented his mind in the Wisdom, Goodness, and All-sufficiently 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, and began to look upon himself as his own preserver; (in a great measure) and therefore he fell to carking and caring for himself, and to studious contrivances for his own preservation and supplies. He searched every

Creature for himself, and laboured to find in it some good for himself, as if the care of himself had been wholly devolved on himself. I have been as much troubled to understand that Text in Gen. 3. 22. as any one almost in the Bible, being somewhat unsatisfied with some ordinary expositions; and yet it is too hard for me. But this seems to me the most probable Interpretation; that in his estate of innocence Adam was as a Child in his Father's house, that was only to study to please his Father, and to do the work that he commanded him, but not to take any thought or care for himself: for while he was obedient, it was his Fathers part to preserve him and provide for him, to keep off death and danger, and supply all his wants. And therefore though man had the faculty or power of knowing more perfect than we have now, yet he did not need to trouble himself about these matters of Self, because they belonged to God: and consequently had not the actual consideration of knowledge of them: for that would have been but a vain and troublesome knowledge and consideration to him: For though the knowledge of all things Necessary to be known, was part of his perfection, yet the actual knowledge of many things unnecessary and vexatious or tempering, may be part of a man's infelicity and misery. And so he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow, Eccl. 1. 18. As man that foreknoweth his own death, is through the fear of it all his life time subject to bondage, Heb. 2. 15. and the fear is more grievous than the death itself; when a beast that knoweth not his death is freed from those fears. Indeed in our fallen estate there is some use for more of this kind of knowledge than before; But in innocence man needed only to know his maker, and his will and works, and the Creature as his utensils, and the glass in which he was to be seen, and to fear with moderation the death which he had threatened, merely as threatened by him. But by the temptation of Satan, man grew desirous to be past a child, at his Father's finding, and under his care, and would take care and thought for himself and know what was good or evil for himself as to the natural man: and so far turned his eye to the Creature to study it for himself, when he should have studied God in it: and to search after good and evil to himself in it, which he should have searched after the attributes of God in it, and daily gazed with holy love and admiration upon his blessed face that shined in this glass: and so he would use the Creature directly for himself, which he should have used only for Gods service. And thus I conceive man did indeed by his fall attain to much more actual knowledge as to the number of objects than he had before: which knowledge was indeed in itself considered Physically good, but not Good to him as any part of his felicity, or his virtue, but rather by

participation his sin and misery, as being unsuitable to his condition. It was better with him when he knew One God, and all things in God as they conduced to the Love and Service of God, and were suitable to his state, than when he turned his mind from God, and fell to study the Creature in itself, and for himself, as Good or Evil to himself, and so lost himself and his understanding in a crowd of unnecessary and misused objects: Like a foolish Patient that having a most judicious and faithful Physician that will take care of his health, and provide him the best and safest remedies, doth grow to an eager desire to be acquainted himself with the nature of each medicine and to be skilful in the cure of his own disease, that he may trust his Physician no longer, but may be his own Physician: and therefore hearken to a seducer that tells him [The Physician doth but keep thee in ignorance, lest thou shouldst be as wise as he, and able to cure or preserve thy self, hearken to me, and I will teach thee to know all these things thy self, and so thou must take care of thy self.] So man was seduced by Satan to withdraw himself from the fatherly care of God, by a desire himself to be wise for himself in the knowledge of all that in the Creature which might be directly good or evil to himself, so taking on himself the work of God, and casting off the work that God had set him, and withdrawing himself from his necessary dependence on his Maker. And accordingly much of this selfishness knowledge of the Creature he did attain: but with the woeful loss of the Divine knowledge of the Creature, and of the filial soul-contenting knowledge of God: yea and of himself, as in his due subordination to God. This seems the sense of this text, and this is the case of fallen mankind.

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: O what would a carnal man give that he had but his life and health in his own hand, and might keep them as long as he saw good! When he is poor, he had rather it were in his hand to supply his wants, than in Gods; for he thinks it would go better with him. When he is sick, he had far rather it were in his own hand to cure him, than in Gods, for then he should be sure of it. If he be in any strait, he cannot be content with a bare promise for his deliverance; but unless he see some probability in the means, and work, and unless he be acquainted with the particular way by which he must be delivered he is not satisfied: for he cannot trust God, so well as himself. Is not this the case of all you that are carnal? Would you not think your case much safer and better if it were in your own hands, than you do now it is in Gods! What would you not give,

that you were but as able to give ease, and health and wealth, and honour, and life to your selves, as God is! Hence it is that you so anxiously contrive for your selves, and trouble yourselves with needless cares; because you dare not trust God, but think you are fallen to your own care and finding. You think your selves quite undone when you have nothing left you but God and his Promise to trust upon, and when you see nothing in your selves and the Creature to support you. And thus are all men fallen from God to themselves.

But Sanctification teacheth men that self-denial which according to its measure, doth heal them of this disease. Though some actual knowledge of good and evil, and some care of our natural selves be now become a necessary duty, as suited to our lapsed state, which yet 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 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: Yea he knoweth that it was God that indeed preserved him, while he was over Solicitous about it himself, and would needs have the managing of his own affairs. 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: Nor dare he trust himself hereafter with himself or any Creature! He finds that he hath but turmoil and distracted his mind by undertaking the management of his own preservation: and that he hath brought himself into a wilderness, and lost himself and ravelled his own affairs: when if he had committed himself to God, and been satisfied in his Wisdom, Love, and Power, all had been kept safe and sound, and man had not been lost, nor his estate thus shattered and overthrown. And 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. He is so offended with himself for his former self-destruction and for undoing himself so foolishly, that he calls himself to account and into judgement for it, and condemneth himself as a Traitor to God, and a Murderer of himself, and will no more be in the hands of so treacherous a delinquent: But as the eyes of a servant are on the hand of his Master, so are his eyes on God for all supplies. And this is

the part of the work of the spirit of Adoption, who teacheth us to cry Abba, Father and as Children, not to be very careful for ourselves, but to run to our Father in all our wants, and tell him, what we stand in need of and beg relief: and to be careful for nothing: but in everything by prayer with supplication and thanksgiving to make known our requests to God, Phil. 4. 6. And this acquiescence of the soul in the love of God is it that keepeth our hearts and minds in that Peace of God which passeth understanding, vers. 7. so that the more self-dental, the less is a man dependant on himself, or troubled with the cares of his own preservation: and the more doth he cast himself on God, and is careful to please him that is his true Preserver, and then quieteth and resteth his mind in his All-sufficiency and infinite wisdom and love; and so is a mere dependent upon God.

7. Moreover; It is the Prerogative of God as absolute Owner of us, to be the sole Disposer of man and of all the other Creatures: and to choose them their condition, and give them their several Talents, and determine of the events of all their affairs, as pleaseth himself; And 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 the 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 Gods disposal. If he had the matter in his own hands, almost nothing should be as it is; but so cross would they be to God that all thing would be turned upside down: If it were at their will, there's 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 Labourer 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 honour with men should be more; the Gentleman would be a Knight, and the Knight a Lord, and 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 learn the doctrine of the Jews, and many of this age among us, to expect that the world should be ruled by them; and they should reign as Lords and Princes in the earth. If it were with selfish men as they would have it, there's 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; and 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's few of the unsanctified that would ever die, nor look after Heaven as long as they could live on earth. O what a brave 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? Had they but their own wills, they would think themselves the happiest men on earth: that is, if they could be delivered from the will of God, and be from under his disposal, and get the reins into their own hands!

Nay this is not all, but the selfish person would be the disposer of all the world within his reach, as well as of himself. He would have Kingdoms at his dispose, and all things carried according to his Will: He would have all his neighbours have a dependence upon him; Very bountiful he would be, if he were the Lord of all: For he would be the great Benefactor of the world, and have all men beholden to him, and depend upon him. If he see things that little concern him, he hath a will of his own that would fain have the Disposal of them. If he hear of the affairs of other Nations, some will he hath of his own which he would have fulfilled in them, at least so far as any of his own interest may be involved in the business.

But when Sanctification hath brought men to self-denial, then they discern and lament this folly: They see what silly giddy worms they are to be Disposers of themselves, or of the world: They see that they have neither wisdom, nor goodness, nor power sufficient for so great a work. They then perceive that it were better make an Idiot 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 endeavoured 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, that so he may do with his own as he list. He finds that he hath work enough to do of his own, and is become too unfit for that: and therefore he dare no more 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: and therefore he will give up himself to God and stand to his will: If he feels that Providence

doth cross his flesh, and that he hath Poverty when the flesh would have riches, and shame when that carnal self would have honour, and labour when the flesh would have ease, and sickness when the flesh would have health, he would not for all that have the work taken out of the hand of God, but truly saith, Not my will but thine be done: and believeth that Gods disposal is the best; and that his Father knows well enough what he doth; And if it were put to his choice, whether God or he should be the Disposer of his estate and honour and Life, he had rather it were in God's hands than his own: and would not undertake the charge, if it were offered him. Alas, thinks he, I am almost below a man and am I fit to make a God of? I come off so lamely in the duty of a Creature as deserves damnation: and am I fit to arrogate the work of the Creator?

8. Moreover it is the high Prerogative of God to be the Sovereign Ruler of the world; to make Laws for them, which 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; and 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 Gods 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, and therefore he is against it as supposing it to be against him and his pleasure, profit, and honour in the world. If men had but the Government of themselves, what a difference would there be between their way and Gods? 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 these, [Except a man be Converted, or born again, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of heaven: without Holiness none shall see God.] If self might make Laws, you should not read in them [If ye live after the flesh ye shall die; but if by the Spirit ye mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live▪] Nor should you there find, that the Gate is strait, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few there be that find it; or that the righteous are scarcely saved] As 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 threatened everlasting torments, should be razed out; and you shall find no talk of damnation in the Scripture for such as they: no talk of the worm that never dyeth, or the fire that is never quenched, or of [Depart from me all ye workers of iniquity; I know you not] or that [the way of the ungodly shall perish] or that [God doth laugh at them, because he seeth that their day is coming] 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: the Articles of our Creed would be changed: the Petitions of our Rule for Prayer would be most altered: every one of the ten Commandments would be altered, as I shall after shew. 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 Lords day should 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 list, and his will should be his Law, and himself should be his own Judge; a gentle tender Judge no doubt. Thus would self-Rule.

But sanctification brings men to Deny this self; and to lay down the Arms of Rebellion against God; and to see how unfit we are to Rule ourselves; that we are too foolish, and sinful, and partial to make Laws, and too partial also and tender to execute them; and that as we were made to obey, so obey we must, and come again into our ranks, and willingly subject ourselves to the Sovereign of the world. Self-denial teacheth a man to have his own Carnal wisdom and reasoning that rise up against the Laws of God; and to Love them the worse because they are thus his own; and to love the Laws of God the better, because they are God's, and because they are against his Carnal self. The stamps of God on them doth make them currant with him, when if they had but the private stamps of self, he would disown them as counterfeit or treasonable. He hath indeed a flesh that is restrained by Gods Laws, and striveth against them; but he thinks never the worse of the Law for that, but approveth and liketh it in the inner man: and 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 that self is not the Chooser in him; but he hath learned to submit to the will and wisdom of the Lord.

And though he love himself, and have a nature that is unwilling of suffering, and feareth the displeasure of God, and the threatening of his holy Law: yet doth he unfeigned justify the Law, and acknowledge it to be holy, and just, and good; and would not have the very threatening of it to be repealed and blotted out, if he had his choice: for he knows that the Determinations of God are the best, and that none but he is fit to govern, and therefore he desires that he himself may be taught better to obey, and not that he may rule; and wisheth that he were more conformed to the Law; and not that the Law were conformed to him; and fain he would have his own will brought up to Gods, but wisheth not Gods will to be crooked and brought down to his. As far as men have self-denial, this is so.

9. Moreover, as it is Gods 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. An eager desire there is in the unsanctified selfish heart, that he might be Ruler of Town and Country, and all might be brought to do his will. And 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, and therefore would have power to force men to it: Hence it is that there is such a stir in the world for Crowns and Kingdoms: and few men have ever been heard of, that have refused a Sceptre when it was offered them, yea or that would not step out of their way for it, and wound their Consciences, and hazard all their hopes of Heaven for it, if they found themselves in a likelihood of obtaining it; because where self doth reign at home, it would reign also over all others. Nothing more pleaseth the Carnal mind, than to have his will, and to have all men do what he would have them, and to see all at his beck, and each man seeking to know his Pleasure, ready to receive his word for Law. This is the reign of self.

But sanctification teaching men self-denial, doth make them look first at the Doing of Gods will; and would have all the world obedient to that; and for their own wills, they resign them absolutely to Gods, and would not have men obey them but in a due subordination to the

Lord. As they affect 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 Gods will, to which they are serviceable and conform. The self-denying sanctified man hath as careful an eye up and down the world for Gods interest, as the self-seeker hath for his own: And as eagerly doth he long to hear of the setting up of the Name, and Kingdom, and Will or Laws of God in the world, as the ambitious man longs for the setting up of his own. And it as much rejoiceth the holy self-denying man to hear that Gods 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 all himself, and his will become the Law of the world. An 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, and 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 chief Interest of the sanctified: for the hath destroyed the contradictory Interest of self, and renounced it, and hath taken God for his End, and Christ for the Way, and consequently for his highest Interest: so that he hath now no business in the world but Gods business; he hath no honour to regard but Gods honour; 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 and given himself for him; and thereby hath drawn him out of himself to the Fountain and End of Love; and so it is not he that lives, but Christ liveth in him, Gal. 2. 20.

10. Lastly, it is the high Prerogative of God, to have the honour and Power and Glory ascribed to him, and be praised as the author of all Good to the world: and his Glory he will not give to another: Man and all things are Created, and 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 which we expected by him.

But when sin turned man from God to himself, he became regardless of the honour of God, and his mind was bent on his own Honour, so that he would have every knee bow to himself, and every eye observe him, and every mind think highly of him, and every tongue

to praise and magnify him: It doth him good at the heart, to have virtue, and wisdom, and greatness ascribed to him, and an excellency in all; and to have all the good that is done ascribed to him, and to be taken to be 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 of him but well, and great things; and when he sees them all observe and reverence him, and take him as an Oracle for wisdom, or as an Angel of God, O how this pleaseth his unsanctified selfish mind! Now he hath his End, even that which he would have; and verily saith Christ, they have their reward.

But when Sanctification hath taught men to deny themselves, they see then that they are vile and miserable sinners, and loath themselves for all their abominations; and are base in their own eyes, and humble themselves before the Lord, and abhor themselves in dust and ashes, and say, To us belongeth shame and confusion of face; Not unto us O Lord, not unto us, but to thy Name give the glory, Psal. 115. 1. Dan. 9. 7, 8. The holy self-denying soul desireth no glory and honour, but what may conduce to the glory and honour of his Lord: His heart riseth against base flattering worldlings, that would rob God and give the honour to him: nor can they do him a greater displeasure than to ascribe that to him belongeth only to God, or to bring to him or any Creature, his Makers due. If God be honoured, he takes himself as honoured, if he be never so low: If God be dishonoured, he is troubled, and his own honour will not make him reparation. 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 be most honoured by his disgrace and shame, he can submit.

And thus I have shewed you the true Nature both of selfishness and of self-denial. But observe that I describe it as it is in itself: but 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.