

Why Self-Denial is a Necessary for Salvation

A Sermon by Richard Baxter

And now you have seen the Description of self-denial, and I hope, if you have studied it, you know what it is that is required; I shall next shew you some of the Reasons of its Necessity, and prove it to you beyond dispute that it is no indifferent thing, nor the high attainment of some few of the Saints, but a thing that all must have that will be saved, being of the very essence of holiness itself; so that it is as possible to live without life; as to be Holy without self-denial; and as possible to be saved whether God will or no, as to be saved without self-denial in a predominant degree. And if any of you thing strange that salvation should be laid on so high a duty, and that no man can be a true Disciple that denyeth not himself, even to the forsaking of his Life, and all, when God requireth it, I shall shew you that Reason that should easily satisfy you.

Reas. 1. Till a man Deny himself, he denyeth God, and doth not indeed believe in him, and love him, and take him to be his God. And I hope you will grant that no man can be saved that believes not in God, nor Loveth him, nor takes him for his God: He that will deny God and yet think to be saved, must think to be saved in despite of God. The first Article of our faith, and of our Baptismal Christian Covenant, is to believe in God the Father, and take him for our God, and give up ourselves to be his people. But this no man can do without self-denial. For by all that I have said in the description of it, you may see that selfishness is most contrary to God, and would rob him of all his high Prerogatives, and God should be no God, if the selfish sinner had his will: and he doth not heartily consent that he shall be God to him. I have formerly told you, that self is the God of wicked men, or the world's great Idol: And that the inordinate Love of Pleasure, Profits and Honour, in Trinity, is all but this self-love in Unity; and that in the Malignant Trinity of Gods enemies, the flesh is the first and foundation, the world the second, and the Devil the third: Every man is an Idolater so far as he is selfish. God is not a bare name: He that takes away his Essence or Attributes and Prerogatives, and yet thinks he believeth in him, because he leaveth him his name and Titles, doth as bad as they that set up an Image, and worship that instead of God, or that worship the Sun or Moon as Gods, because they somewhat represent his Glory: for sure a

bare Name hath as little substance as an Image; much less can you say it hath more than the Sun. Now selfish ungodly men do all of them rob God, and give his honour and prerogatives to themselves, and put him off with empty Titles: They call him their God, but will not have him for their End, their Portion and Felicity, nor give him the strongest Love of their hearts: They will not take him as their Absolute Owner; and devote themselves and all they have to him, and stand with a willing mind to his Dispose. They will not take him for their Sovereign, and be ruled by him, nor deny themselves for him, nor seek his honour and interest above their own. They call him their Father, but deny him his honour; and their Master, but give him not his fear, Mal. 1. 6. They depend not on his hand, and live not by his Law, and to his Glory; and therefore they do not take him for their God. And can you expect that God should save those that deny him and would dethrone him? that is, his very enemies.

Reas. 2. Yea more than so; God will not save those that make themselves their own Gods, when they have rejected him. But all these unsanctified selfish men, do make themselves their own Gods: for in all the ten particulars before mentioned, they take to themselves the Prerogatives of God. 1. They would be their own End and loose further. 2. They use all Creatures but as means to an End; yea God himself is esteemed but for themselves. 3. They Love their present Life and Prosperity better than God. 4. They would be their own, and live as their own, and not as those that are none of their own. 5. They would have the Creatures to be their own, and use them as their own, and not as God's. 6. They must care for themselves, and shift for themselves and dare not trust themselves wholly upon God. 7. They would dispose of themselves and their own conditions, and of all things else. 8. They would Rule themselves, and be from under the Laws and Government of God. 9. They would be the Rulers of all others, and have all men do their wills. 10. And they would be honoured and admired by all, and have the praise ascribed to them. And if all this be not to set up themselves as Gods or Idols in the world, I know not what is. Certainly God is so far from having a thought of saving such vile Idolaters (in this Condition) that they are the principal objects of his high displeasure, and the fairest Marks for his Justice to shoot at: and he is engaged to pull them down and tread them into hell: should God stand by and see a company of rebellious sinners sit down in his Throne, or usurp his Sovereignty and Divine Prerogatives, and let them alone, yea and advance them to his Glory? No, he hath resolved that he that humbleth himself shall be exalted, and he that exalted himself shall be brought

low. And what higher self-exaltation can there be, than to make ourselves as gods to ourselves? And therefore who should be brought lower than such?

Reas. 3. No man can be a Christian that takes not Christ for his Lord and Saviour; but no man without this self-denial can take Christ for his Lord and Saviour: and therefore no man without self-denial can be a Christian, and so be saved. He that makes himself his End, cannot make Christ as Christ his way: for Christ is the way to the Father, and not to Carnal-self. Nay the business that Christ came upon into the world was to pull down and subdue this self. Moreover whoever taketh Christ for his Saviour, must know from what it is that he must save him; and that is principally from self: And no man can take Christ for his Saviour that renounceth not self-confidence, and is not willing to be saved from the Idolatry of self-exaltation. No man can take Christ for his Master or Teacher, that comes not into his school as a little child, renouncing the guidance of Carnal-self, and sensible of his need of an heavenly Teacher. No man can take Christ for his King and Lord, and give up himself to him as his own and as his Subject, that hath not learned to deny that self that claims propriety and sovereignty in his stead. There is no Antichrist nor false Christ that ever was in the world, that doth more truly oppose Christ, and resist him in all the parts of his office, than Carnal self. It is this that will not stoop to his Righteousness, or to his Guidance, and to his teaching and holy Government. Self is the false Christ or Saviour of the world, as well as the false God. And therefore there can be no salvation, where self is not denied and taken down.

Reas. 4. He that believeth not in the Holy Ghost, and taketh him not for his Sanctifier, cannot be a true Christian or be saved. But no man without this self-denial believeth in the Holy Ghost, and taketh him for his Sanctifier: And therefore without this Self-denial no man can be a true Christian or be saved.

The very nature of sanctification consisteth in the turning a man from himself to God: in destroying selfishness, and devoting the soul to God by Christ. And therefore it is past dispute, that none but the self-denying are sanctified: and therefore none but they do truly take the Holy Ghost for their Sanctifier, and truly believe in him. So far as men are in Love with the disease, it is certain they will not use the Physician.

Reas. 5. No man is a true Christian and in a state of salvation, that denyeth, renounceth or rejecteth the word of God. But all men that have not self-denial (that hear the word of God) do renounce, deny it or reject it: and therefore no man without self-denial is a true Christian or can be saved. In the Scriptures it is that we have eternal life: its they that must make us wise to salvation: the man that will be blessed, must meditate in them day and night, Psal. 1. 3. And it is not the hearers but the Doers of them that are blessed. But nothing is more clear, than that the voice of Scripture calleth aloud on all men to deny themselves; and that the scope of it is to cry down self, and set up God in Jesus Christ. It is the very drift and meaning of it from end to end to take down self, and abase men in their own eyes, and bring them home to God from whom they are revolted.

Reas. 6. No man can be a Christian or be saved without saving Grace. But no man without self-denial hath saving Grace. For it is the nature of every Grace to carry man from himself to God by Christ. It is the work of godly sorrow to humble proud man, and break the heart of carnal self. It is the work of faith, for a self-denying soul to pass out for hope and life to Christ. It is the work of Love to carry us quite above ourselves to that infinite goodness which we love: it is the nature of holy fear to confess our guilt and insufficiency, and to suspect ourselves, and dread the fruit of our own ways. Confidence doth bottom us upon God, and Hope it self doth imply a Despairing in our selves. Thankfulness doth pay the homage to him that hath saved us from ourselves. And every grace hath self-denial as half its very life or soul. And therefore it is certain that no man hath any more grace than he hath self-denial.

Reas. 7. They that reject the Ministry and the fruit of all the Ordinances of God, are not true Christians, nor cannot be saved: But so do all among us that have not self-denial. For the use of the Ministry is to call home sinners from themselves to God. The use of every Ordinance of God, is to get or keep down carnal self and exalt the Lord. Confession is nothing but self-abasing: and he must confess, that will have the faithful and just God to forgive him: for he that covereth his sin shall not prosper, 1 John 1. 9. Prov. 28. 13. Prayer is a confession of our own emptiness, insufficiency and unworthiness, and a flying from ourselves for help unto another. In Baptism we come as condemned prisoners for a pardon, as it were with ropes about our necks, and strip ourselves of the rags of our filthiness, that by the blood of the

lamb we may be washed from our blood, and our sins may be buried as in the depth of the Sea. In the Lords Supper we renew the same Covenant, and receive the same renewed pardon; and still fly from ourselves to Christ for life; and renounce our carnal selves by solemn Covenant, as a people coming home to God. So that never was any Ordinance of God, effectual and saving on the soul of any, further than it brought them to self-denial, or preserved, exercised or manifested it.

Reas. 8. He that can do no work sincerely, nor go one step in the way of life, is no true Christian nor in a state life. But this is the case of all that have not self-denial. For self is their Principle, Rule and End: and he that hath either a false Principle, Rule or End, cannot be sincere in any of the means; much less when he is out in all of these. A selfish man is seeking himself in his very Religion; and is serving himself when he seemeth to be serving God. And indeed he doth not any service sincerely unto God, because he makes not God his End; And therefore cannot be accepted.

Reas. 9. No man is a true Christian or can be saved, that sticks in the depth of his natural misery, in his lapsed state: But so do all men that have not self-denial: for it is self that they are fallen to, and must be saved from.

Reas. 10. No man can be a true Christian and be saved, that is not a member of the Holy Catholic Church and the Communion of Saints. But so is none but the self-denying; for every true member of the Church hath a public spirit, preferring the Churches interest to his own, and suffering with fellow members in their suffering, and having a care of one another, 1 Cor. 12. But the self-seeking unsanctified person is a stranger to this disposition.

Reas. 11. He that is led by the greatest enemy of God and his own soul, is not a true Christian, nor in a state of life. But so is every man that hath not learned to deny himself. For self is the greatest enemy of God and us. Escape but your own hands and you are out of danger. All the Devils in Hell cannot destroy you, if you would not be your own destroyers.

Reas. 12. Lastly, It is a plain contradiction to be saved without self-denial. For as its self that we must be saved from both as our End and Means and greatest enemy: so to stick in self is

still to be lost and miserable, and therefore not to be saved. So that the case is as plain as a case can be, that no man can be a true Christian or Disciple of Christ without self-denial; and consequently none without it can be saved.