

XVI.

Self-Denial.

“If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.”—*Matt. xvi. 24.*

Good works are not the saint’s sanctification, any more than drops of water are the fountain; but they spring as crystal drops from the fountain of sanctification. They are good, not when the saint intends them to be good, but when they conform to the divine law and proceed from a true faith. Yet the *intention* is of great importance; the Church has always taught that a work could not be called good unless it is directed to *the glory of God*.

This is a vital point which must animate and give direction to the whole matter: *only to the glory of God*. Every other intention makes the good work evil. Even the effort to do good works is impossible without the “*Soli Deo Gloria.*”

This is the reason why so many well-meant efforts at so-called sanctification become sinful. For the man who applies himself earnestly and diligently to good works, solely to attain a holier status and thus become a holier person, has lost his reward. His end in view is not God, but himself; and while every good work humbles a man and real sanctification leads to the breaking down and casting out of self, this wrongly planned sanctification causes self-exaltation and spiritual pride.

To think that by self-sanctification God is honored and His glory exalted is self-deception. The divine honor and majesty are so holy and exalted that His glory must be the direct end in view. To work for self-sanctification *directly*, and for His honor *indirectly*, is unworthy of His holiness.

The end and aim of all things must be the Lord God alone. Justice must dwell in the land, not only to preserve order, but to remove iniquity from before, the presence of the Lord. The missionary cause must be supported not only to convert souls, but to summon the nations to appear in Zion before God. Prayer must be offered not only to obtain the good which is bestowed without prayer, but because every creature, morning and evening, must lie in the dust, crying, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord!” making the whole earth full of His glory. And hence every creature *must* do good works, and all the children of God *can* do good works; not that they may become a little more holy, but that the glory of holiness might shine to the praise of our God.

3. This *third point* should therefore never be omitted. Tho our works are according to the law and of faith, but not directed to the glory of God, they can not please Him. It avails nothing, tho the bow be strongly bent and the cord of the best material, if the arrow upon the cord be not turned in the right direction.

The doctrine of Good Works touches the most delicate and most sensitive of our internal emotions, viz., *self-denial*.

Superficial minds, poor in grace and godliness, speak of self-denial but rarely, and then without understanding its meaning. They think that it consists in making room for others; in argument to be the least; to renounce pleasure or profit for a higher purpose; to care for others, not for self. Surely this is a precious fruit; earnestly to be desired; and if it were found more abundantly among the children of God we should thank Him for it. But, alas! there is such leanness of soul even in the most earnest, so much selfishness, ambition, anger, confidence in the creature, that every manifestation of nobler impulse has a most refreshing effect.

But the question now before us is this, whether such making room for others, such self-sacrifice, deserves the name of *self-denial*. And the answer must be a most emphatic “No!” The saint’s self-denial has reference, not to *man*, but to *God*, and for this reason it is superlatively high and holy, difficult and almost impossible.

Of course God’s child loves his heavenly Father, but not with an unalterable love. In spite of his love he is sometimes very unlovely. Still, when the question echoes through his soul, “Simon Bar-Jonah, lovest thou Me?” ([John xxi. 15-17](#)) and he feels tempted by self-reproach to say, “No, Lord,” then the response flashes from the bottom of his soul against all contradiction: “Yes, Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee.” ([John xxi. 17](#))

Therefore nothing would seem more natural than to find pleasure in denying himself for God’s sake. And this is actually the case. He spends his happiest moments in sincere self-denial; for then he is never alone, but always with Jesus, whom he follows. Then he realizes the holiness and transcendent glory of the claim: “If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me.” ([Matt. xvi. 24](#); [Mark viii. 34](#); [Luke ix. 23](#))

But while the blessedness of his *former* self-denials is still fresh in his memory, when called to a new act of the same nature he shrinks from it and finds it almost impossible. Self-denial extends so far. Its depths can not be fathomed. When the plummet has descended the whole length of the line, there is still such a yawning depth beneath that actually the bottom is never touched. It refers, not to a few things, but to all things. It embraces our entire life and existence, with all that is in us, of us, and around us; our entire environment, reputation, position, influence, and possession; it includes all the ties of blood and affection that bind us to wife and children, parents and brothers, friends and associates; all our past, present, and future; all our gifts, talents, and endowment; all the ramifications and extensions of our outward and inward life; the rich life of the soul and the tenderest emotions of our holier impulses; our conflict and our strife; our faith, hope, and love—yea, our inheritance in the Son, our place in the mansions above, and the crown which the righteous judge shall one day give us; and as such, in that entire scope of life, we must deny ourselves before God.

We are, to use an illustration, in all our life and existence like a fruit-tree, broadly rooted, full grown, planted in fertile soil, adorned with a crown of many branches and a glorious



roof of leaves; and like that tree with its roots far and wide in the earth, and its branches high and broad in the air, are we deeply rooted, possessing an existence obtained by means of money, reputation, property, and descent, faith, hope, love, and the promises of God. And to that whole tree, to that entire unit, from deepest root to highest bough, which as our ego, full of might and majesty, stands before our consciousness and in our life, to all this the ax must be laid; of all this the self-denying soul must say: "God is all and I am nothing."

Many say, "This is correct and exactly my idea," and say it quite too often; for when these most difficult and excellent words again and again pass the lips as mere hollow sounds, they strike a discord to the earnest, sensitive soul. But when we grasp the thought as an actual fact, then we find that this denial of our entire existence and being is almost entirely beyond our grasp. Self can minify itself to such extent that we really think that it is gone and denied, while at the same time it stands behind our back, grinning with Satanic glee. Self, big and inflated, is not hard to deny. In this way the unconverted stands before God, but not the saint. That has been taken from him. Such is no more the impulse of his desire. But self shrunk, reduced partly unclothed, hiding behind pious emotions and piles of good works, is extremely dangerous. For what more is there to be *denied*? There is scarcely anything left. He seeks no longer the world, nor his own glory; his only end in view is the glory of God. At least, so he thinks. But he is mistaken. Self is there still. It is like a spring tightly bent for a time, but only to rebound with accumulated force. And what was called self-denial is really nothing else *than self taking care of its own*. And that is the worst of it, self is so dangerously cunning. The heart of man is "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who can know it?"

When we are inclined to sin, self leaves its hiding-place and with all its power labors hard to make us sin. But when the Holy Spirit woos and constrains us, weaning us from sin, then, slunk in a corner, it hides itself, decoying us into the delusion that it has ceased to be. It is then that, with evident satisfaction, deluded piety asks whether the denial of *self* is not complete.

But the true saint is known by this: while the self-deluded one is satisfied with this spiritual trickery, he is not. He discovers the trick. Then he reproaches himself. He drives self from, its place of concealment. He scolds and cursed that evil being that always stands between him and his God. And with groans he supplicates. "Almighty, merciful, and gracious God, have mercy upon me."

Self-denial is not an outward act, but an inward turning of our being. As the steamship is turned about by the rudder, which is swung by the means of a wheel, so there is within our being a rudder, or whatever you may call it, which is turned by a small wheel, and as we turn the entire craft either leeward or windward, we deny either self or God. In its deepest sense we *always* deny either the one or the other. When we stand well we deny *self*; in all other cases we deny *God*. And the internal wheel by which we turn the entire craft of

our ego is our *intention*. The rudder determines the course of the ship; not its rigging and cargo; nor the character of the crew, but its *direction*, the destination of the voyage, its final haven. Hence, when we see our craft steering away from God, we swing the rudder the other way and compel it to turn toward God.

Notice the rigging and the cargo. The former may be magnificent: excellent talent, superior mind, a rich state of grace. The latter may be very precious: a treasure of knowledge, of moral power, of consecrated love, of melting and adoring piety. And yet with that excellent rigging and that precious cargo, we can steer our craft away from God and aim at self. Then only is there *self-denial* when, without regard to rigging and lading, a man causes his craft to run directly to the glory of God.

The *intention* is everything. And it is this very intention which can so bitterly mislead us. That small wheel of our intentions is so exceedingly sensitive that a mere touch of the finger can reverse its action. This is why we are such ready believers in the goodness and beauty of our intentions.

Hence the need of deep, correct, intimate *knowledge of self*. And who possesses this? And since by His light the Holy Spirit constantly refines and chastens our self-knowledge, is it not perfectly natural that, while to-day we imagine ourselves to be quite advanced in self-denial, only next week we discover how bitterly mistaken we are?

To seek and look for one's highest good and eternal salvation, not in every creature, but in God; to use spiritual or material gifts not for ourselves, but for His glory; to esteem all perishable things of no account compared to the eternal; unwilling to be one's own lord, but as God's servant to enter His employ; no longer to possess any precious things, as money or treasure, or even one's children, as one's own, but to know oneself the appointed steward of the Lord; to have no more care or anxious thought; but renouncing every trust in man, in capital or fixed income, or in any other creature, to trust only and solely in the faithful God; to be at peace with one's lot and with God's will; and, finally, to direct all intentions and emotions away from oneself upon the Beloved and Glorious One,—is this not far-reaching? And can our own progress in regard to it ever satisfy us?

And yet such self-denial is required to render our works *good works* indeed, in which the angels can rejoice.

Thus the things which the Holy Spirit took from Christ to give unto us return to our Surety; for it is evident that not one of our good works can ever be complete in that sense. Our self-denial is never perfect. Hence the sad complaint that "our best works are ever polluted before God"; and the prayer for the cleansing even, of our good works.

And this must be so; it has been divinely ordained that God's children shall never leave Christ. If they really obtained perfection they would lose sight of their Surety; but the fact that even their best effort is defiled drives them to Christ for the atonement and cleansing in His blood. *Self-denial is a fruit of the atonement made perfect only by the atonement.* And

thus, in the growing and ripening of spiritual fruit, God uses our thoughts, words, and deeds as instruments of sanctification.

For does not the exercise of frequent self-denial and the subsequent yielding of the fruit of righteousness, under the Spirit's gracious operation, create holy habits in the soul? Is not in this way the natural bent of the heart transferred from Satan to God? And when the Holy Spirit makes these holy habits, this bent of the heart toward holiness, a permanent disposition, then we have become fellow workers with God in our own sanctification. Nor is it as tho He did one part and we another, but He using our work as a chisel in the sculpturing of our own soul.

And from this motive the faithful ministers of the Word should persuade, incite, and constrain believers to be always abounding in the work of the Lord. Sanctification must be preached as with the mouth of loudest trumpet. The Church of Christ imperatively needs it. The word which declares that God is a God who justifieth the ungodly may not be severed from that other word: "Be ye holy, for I am holy." (*Lev. xx. 7; 1 Peter i. 16*) The operations of the Word and of the Holy Spirit flow together. Therefore every young disciple of Christ should not only confess His name and live according to the desires of his heart, but flee from worldly lusts to walk holily and sincerely before the Lord.

Ministers of the Word should be careful not to conceal the majesty of the Lord Jehovah behind the cross of Christ. The responsibility must be fearful, if ever it should appear that our preaching of the cross of Christ, instead of having smothered sin, had quenched holy living.

Second Chapter.

LOVE.

XVII.

Natural Love.

“And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.”—*Rom. v. 5.*

Sanctification does not *exhaust* the work of the Holy Spirit. It is an *extraordinary* work, necessitated by man's *fall into sin*. *Love*, of which we now will treat, is His deepest and most proper work, which He would have wrought even if sin had *never been heard of*; which He will continue after death; which He works now already in the angels, and which He will continue in us in the mansions of the Father's house evermore. Necessarily, across the path of quickening love falls the dark shadow of that terrible operation of *judgment* and *hardening* which the Holy Spirit works in the lost. We will close with a sketch of *the unpardonable sin* against the Holy Ghost.

Our subject is not love in general, but *Love*. The difference is evident. Love signifies the only pure, true, *divine* Love; by love in general is understood every expression of kindness, attachment, mutual affection, and devotion wherein are seen reflections of the glory of Eternal Love.

Love in its general sense is also found in the world of animals; a love so strong sometimes that it shames man, casting reproach upon his conscience. The tenderness of the mother hen is proverbial. The same hen which at other times runs away at the distant approach of dog or cat, flies at the ugliest cat or fiercest bulldog when she has chickens to defend. Every mother bird defends her eggs at the price of her life. And altho neither cat nor dog had the least consideration for the mother love of hen or duck, yet both manifest the same love for their young ones. The most bloodthirsty animals, even tigers and hyenas, are never more enraged than when the hunter approaches their whelps too closely. It is unnecessary to say that love in this sense has no moral value. Yet it is not valueless. Christ made the love of the mother hen a type of His own love for His people and for Jerusalem. And when our small boys are furious when they see the male rabbit kill his young while the female fights for them, there is in their boyish hearts a pure voice of praise for the superior love of that little mother. However, praise for this love which is merely instinctive, increated, and irresistible belongs, not to the mother hen or mother lion, but to Him who created it in them.