

THE DUTY OF SELF DENIAL

THOMAS WATSON



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ABOUT THIS BOOK



A penetrating Puritan treatise on Christ's command: "**Let him deny himself.**" Watson systematically unpacks what self-denial means for the Christian life — denying carnal reason where it contradicts faith, mortifying fleshly desires, and surrendering personal ambition to God's will. With his characteristic **vivid imagery** and sharp pastoral wit, he rebukes spiritual complacency, laments the scarcity of true self-denial, and offers practical helps for cultivating it through **humility, love, and faith**. A brief but powerful work that strikes at the root of discipleship.



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INTRODUCTION



The Duty of Self-Denial Briefly Explained and Applied.
By **Thomas Watson**, Minister of the Gospel.

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TO THE READER



TO THE READER.

Christian Reader,

The weight of the subject discussed here truly deserves a longer book, but I have kept it short so that it might reach more hands. I must say that I do not know a more essential topic in **Divinity**. Self-denial is the first principle of Christianity. It is the lifeblood that must flow through the whole body of religion. Self-denial is not learned from the **Topics** of philosophy, but from the **Oracles** of Scripture. I ask the reader to study this handbook seriously, knowing that the **Practice** of self-denial is closely tied to his salvation. May the Lord work through His Word and cause the dew of His blessing to fall with this Manna. This is the prayer of

Your Friend and Servant in the Gospel, **Thomas Watson**.
Dowgate. In the year **1675**.

THE DUTY OF SELF-DENIAL



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Luke 9:23._ And He said to them all, If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself.

The End.

CHAPTER 1: A PRELIMINARY DISCOURSE, WHEREIN THE PROPOSITION IS COMPRISED



CHAPTER 1. A PRELIMINARY DISCUSSION, CONTAINING THE MAIN PROPOSITION.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for Doctrine, 2 Timothy 3:16. The Word is compared to a **Lamp** for its ability to give light, **Psalm** 119:105. It is also compared to **Silver refined** for its ability to enrich, **Psalm** 12:6. Among all the parts of Sacred Scripture, this passage stands out: **If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself.**

These words come from the lips of Christ, the **Oracle of Truth**. In the verse before this, our Blessed Savior predicted His suffering: **The Son of man must suffer many things**. His suffering is described in two ways:

1. He must be **rejected**. He was **The stone which the builders refused**, Psalm 118:22.

2. He must be **slain**. This Diamond had to be cut. He who gave life to others had to die Himself. And just as Christ humbled Himself for us, so we must **deny** ourselves for Him: **And He said to them all, if any man will come after Me, let him deny himself**. Self-denial is the foundation of godliness, and if this foundation is not laid well, the whole building will collapse. Let me explain these words.

1. **And He said to them all]** Self-denial has **universal scope**. It concerns everyone and applies to both ministers and laypeople. Christ spoke this to His **Apostles** as well as the rest of His listeners.

2. **If any man will come after Me]** If he will follow Me as a soldier follows his **General** -- if he wants to reach the place of glory where I am going,

3. **Let him deny himself.]** **Beza** and **Erasmus** translate this as: let him **lay aside** or **reject** himself. Self-denial is a kind of self-emptying. The words have two parts: 1. A condition: **If any man will come after Me]** 2. A requirement: **Let him deny himself**. This phrase, **Let him deny**, is not just a **permission** but a **command**. It carries the force of a royal decree, as if a King should say, **Let it be enacted**.

The main point I will focus on is this: A true Christian must be a self-denier. **Let him deny himself**.

CHAPTER 2: THE EXPLAINING OF THE PROPOSITION



CHAPTER 2. EXPLAINING THE PROPOSITION.

Question 1. In what sense should a Christian not deny himself?

Response 1.1. He must not deny his **Promise**. A person's promise should be **sacred**. He must keep it even if it costs him something, **Psalm 15:1, 4**. Whoever breaks his promise will find that God rejects his profession of faith.

2. A Christian must not deny his **Grace**. He must not disown any good work that God has done in him. He should not call himself **a dry tree** when the dew of Heaven rests on his branches. Just as it is sin for someone to make himself appear **better** than he is, it is also sin to make himself appear **worse**. Claiming to have Grace when you have none is presumption. Claiming to have no Grace when you do is ingratitude -- it is bearing false witness against the Spirit of God.

Question 2. In what sense should a Christian deny himself?

Response In general, he must deny that **sinful nature** which is as close to him as himself -- that which is as precious to him as the **apple of his eye**. But more specifically,

1. A Christian must deny his **Reason**. I do not say **abandon** it, but **deny** it. Some people elevate the idol of Reason, making it the rule and standard of faith. **What is absurd to reason must be false**, said a **Socinian**. It is true that the existence of God and the duty to worship Him are **laws written** on the human heart, consistent with reason. But who God is and the right way to worship Him -- this is such a **mystery** that reason can no more discover it than the **Philistines** could solve **Samson's riddle**. Job 11:7. **Can you by searching find out God?** Reason must be denied in two areas: 1. **What we believe**. 2. **What we do**.

1. In **what we believe -- in doctrines proposed for our faith**.

1. The Doctrine of the **Trinity**. **The well is deep**, and who can measure its depths with the measuring line of reason! The Persons in the Trinity are distinct but not divided. They are three persons but one essence. The Trinity is purely an object of **Faith**. Some truths in religion can be demonstrated by reason -- for example, that we should **flee vice** and **treat others as we would want to be treated**. But the Trinity of Persons in the Unity of Essence comes from divine revelation and must be accepted by faith. The most brilliant philosophers, who could speak skillfully about the size and influence of the stars and the nature of plants and minerals, could never discover the mystery of the Trinity through their deepest investigation. This truth is entirely supernatural and must be received with humble faith.

2. The Doctrine of the **Incarnation**. That Eternity should be born. That He who rules the stars should nurse at a mother's breast. That **a Virgin should conceive**. That the Branch should bear the Root. That in Christ there should be two natures yet only one Person. That the divine nature was not converted into the human, yet the human nature was taken up into the Person of the Son of God. The human nature is not God, yet it is one with God. Here reason must be denied.

3. The Doctrine of the **Resurrection**. That the body, once buried and crumbled into a thousand pieces with its ashes scattered in the air, should rise again -- this is beyond reason to imagine. The **Epicureans** and **Stoics** mocked **Paul** when he preached the Resurrection to them, **Acts 17:32**. Here reason must submit. **John 5:28. Marvel not at this, for the hour is coming in which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice and shall come forth.** A chemist can take several metals mixed together and separate one from the other -- the silver from the gold, the base metal from the silver -- and restore each metal to its own **kind**. In the same way, when the bodies of people are mixed with other substances, the wise God can make a sudden separation and clothe every soul with its own body. If the exact same body did not rise, it would be a **Creation** rather than a **Resurrection**. **Acts 26:8, Why should it be thought incredible that God should raise the dead?** God can do it because of His **Power**, **Matthew 22:29**. And He must do it because of His Truth. The doctrines of faith do not contradict reason; they go beyond it.

2. Reason must be denied in **what we do -- in duties we are commanded to practice**. Many duties in religion provoke objections from sinful reason. God says, it is **The glory of a man to**

pass by an offense, Proverbs 19:11. But sinful reason says it is cowardice. The pagans thought it showed great spirit to take revenge for wrongs done to them. God says the paths of holiness are covered with roses, **Proverbs 3:17, Her ways are ways of pleasantness**. But **Reason** objects: Those paths are harsh and joyless. I must crucify my pleasures and drown my happiness in tears. God says religion is profitable, 1 **Timothy 6:8, Godliness is great gain**. It brings contentment from the favor of God, and it brings earthly riches, **Proverbs 3:16, In her left hand riches and honor**. The way to prosper is to be godly. But **Reason** objects: If I follow the path of religion, I will go bankrupt. 2 **Chronicles 25:9, What shall I do for the hundred Talents?** In cases like these, sinful reason must be denied and resisted. Whoever refuses to go further than reason will fall many miles short of Heaven.

2. A Christian must deny his **Will**. This is **Brugensis's** interpretation of the text. The will is the **prime mover**, the great wheel in the soul that drives all the emotions. In the state of innocence, the will was in proper order and echoed God's will. But since the **fall**, though it keeps its freedom in moral actions, it is corrupted in spiritual matters. If the will could stop sinning (says **Bernard**), there would be no Hell. The deepest wound has fallen on the will. When a sailor's compass is struck by lightning, it causes the needle to point the wrong way. In the same way, human nature being corrupted causes the will to point the wrong direction -- it leans toward evil. The will has not only **weakness** but **stubbornness**, Acts 7:51, **You have always resisted the Holy Ghost**. So here we must deny our will and bring it into line with God's will. If a crooked stick is laid on level ground, we do not re-

shape the ground to match the stick. Instead, we straighten the stick to match the ground. God's will should not be bent to match ours. Our will, being crooked, must be brought to match God's will. We pray, **Your will be done**. The way to get what we truly want is to deny our own will.

3. A Christian must deny his **own righteousness** -- his good behavior, religious duties, and good works. **Philippians 3:9, That I may be found in Him not having my own Righteousness**. A spider weaves a web from its own body. In the same way, a hypocrite tries to spin a web of salvation from his own righteousness. But Saint **Paul**, like the **Bee**, drew his salvation from the flower of Christ's Righteousness. **Isaiah 64:6, Our righteousnesses are as filthy rags**. Even our best efforts are contaminated with sin. Put gold in the fire and impurities come out. Our finest acts of service are mixed with unbelief. The angel pouring **sweet incense** into the prayers of the saints, **Revelation 8:3**, shows that our prayers are unpleasant on their own and need Christ's sweet fragrance to make them acceptable.

Practice your duty, but trust in Christ's Righteousness for salvation. **Noah's** Dove used her wings to fly, but she trusted in the Ark for safety.

If we must deny even our holy acts when it comes to justification, how much more must we deny our mere good behavior. A wooden post may be beautifully painted, but it has no root. A person may be painted over with good behavior yet have no root of Grace. A moral person is **washed** but not **changed**. The outward life may be respectable while the heart is wicked -- just as the sea may look calm while its water is salty. The Pharisee could say he was **no Adulterer**, Luke 18:11. But could he say he was not

proud? A well-behaved person may secretly despise true goodness. He may hate Grace as much as he hates vice. Good behavior alone is a **weak claim** to Heaven. A brass coin may shine, but if it does not carry the **King's image** it will not be accepted as currency. A person may shine with moral virtues, but if he lacks the Image of God -- which consists in holiness -- he will not be accepted on the day of judgment. Morality is good, but God will say, **Yet you lack one thing**, Mark 10:31. Good behavior is a fine **walking stick** for getting along with people, but it is a poor **ladder** for climbing up to Heaven.

4. A Christian must deny all **Self-confidence**. How confident **Pendleton** was in himself! **This fat of mine** (he said) **shall melt in the fire for Christ**. But instead, his courage melted. The same Hebrew word means both **confidence** and **folly**. Self-confidence reveals folly. **Peter** relied too much on his own strength, **Matthew 26:34, Though I should die with You, yet will I not deny You**. But how quickly his confidence was shattered -- blown down by the words of a servant girl? **Matthew 26:71, 72, He denied with an Oath, saying, I know not the man. Peter's** denial of Christ came from his failure to deny himself. Healthy self-distrust is good. **Romans 11:20, Be not high-minded, but fear**. The trembling reed often stands while the confident Cedar falls. Who that knows the fierceness of a trial or the deceitfulness of his own heart will not be cautious? How many professors have shone like stars in the church's sky, yet turned out to be **falling stars? Porphyry, Julian, Cardinal Pool, Gardiner, Judas**. The Apostles have been called by some of the early church fathers the eyes of the world, Christ's feet, the Church's nourishment. **Judas** was one of these, yet he was a traitor. Even some of the

saints, when God withdrew the influence of His Spirit, have temporarily fallen away. Like **Cranmer** and **Origen**, whose heart failed during the seventh persecution, and he offered incense to the idol. Deny self-confidence. 1 Corinthians 10:12, **Let him that thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall.** It is just for God to abandon the person who trusts in himself. The vine, being weak, wraps itself around the elm for support. A good Christian, knowing his own weakness, wraps himself by faith around Christ. Philippians 4:13, **I can do all things through Christ strengthening me.** **Samson's** strength was in his hair; ours lies in our Head, Christ.

5. A Christian must deny **self-conceit.** Job 11:12, **Vain man would be wise.** In the Hebrew the word is **empty man.** Human beings are proud creatures. We are naturally inclined to have an inflated opinion of ourselves.

-- The peacock displays its feathers --

Acts 8:9, **There was a certain man named Simon, giving out that himself was some great one.** **Sapor** styled himself Brother of the Sun and Moon. **Commodus** the Emperor called himself **The Golden Hercules.** The **Persian** Kings demanded that everyone entering **Babylon** worship their images. Those who view themselves in the flattering mirror of self-love appear bigger in their own eyes than they really are. They think their spark is a sun and their drop is an ocean. They have an inflated opinion of their **intellect**, their wit and abilities, and are quick to look down on others. The **Chinese** say that **Europe** has one eye and they have two, while all the rest of the world is blind.

As if the gods crafted their hearts from finer clay.

Deny self-conceit. Romans 12:3, **I say to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think.** Proverbs 23:4, **Cease from your own wisdom.** This does not mean stop being wise, but stop thinking of yourself as wise. To help you deny all proud, arrogant thoughts about yourself, consider the following:

1. Self-conceit is no small sin. **Chrysostom** calls it the mother of Hell. It is a kind of idolatry -- a worshipping of self.

2. Whatever noble gift you have, it is **borrowed**. It is like the axe that fell into the water. 2 Kings 6:5, **Alas master, for it was borrowed.** All of a person's gifts -- his quick mind, his sharp wit -- are borrowed from Heaven. What wise person would be proud of a jewel that is only lent to him? 1 Corinthians 4:7, **What do you have that you did not receive?** The moon has no reason to boast about her light, since she owes it all to the sun.

3. Whatever sharpness of mind or depth of judgment you have, consider how far short you fall.

1. How far short do you fall of the knowledge that **Adam** had before the fall? He was the source of wisdom. He could unlock nature's hidden secrets and understand things that baffle us. **Adam** had full insight into the causes of things. He was like an angel on earth.

But how far short do you fall of him? Your knowledge is streaked with ignorance. There are many hard puzzles in nature that cannot easily be solved. Why does the loadstone ignore gold and pearl, yet attract iron? Why does the **Nile** overflow in summer, when rivers are usually at their lowest? **What way the light is parted?** Job 38:24. Why is the sea higher than the land, yet

does not flood it? How do **the bones grow in the womb?** Ecclesiastes 11:5. What explains all the hidden properties of nature? Even the person who sees most clearly still has a fog before his eyes. By eating from **the tree of knowledge**, we lost **the key of knowledge**.

2. How far short do you fall of the knowledge that Satan has. He gets his name from his knowledge. We read of the **depths of Satan**, Revelation 2:24. And his **schemes**, 2 Corinthians 2:11. Satan is an intelligent spirit. Though he has lost his holiness, he has not lost his knowledge. Though he has lost his armor, he has not lost his cunning. He has enough intelligence **to deceive the Nations**, Revelation 20:3. His understanding is quick, and compared with ours, it is like the swift flight of an eagle compared with the slow crawl of a snail. Why then should anyone be puffed up about their own knowledge, when the Devil far surpasses them in it?

3. How far short do you fall of the knowledge that those who are perfected in glory possess. A person who is taller than a dwarf may still be shorter than a giant. Those who surpass others in natural abilities are still smaller in stature than the glorified saints. 1 Corinthians 13:12, **We see in a riddle, through a glass darkly**. But the saints in Heaven have a full, clear vision of God. Their light, which burned here like a smothered fire, is now blown into a pure flame. A glorified infant knows more than the most learned scholars on earth. In Heaven all **shadows fly away**, for the **Sun of Righteousness** has risen there with His brilliant beams. This should strip away the feathers of pride and self-conceit.

4. Your **dark side** is broader than your **bright side**. Your ignorance outweighs your knowledge. Your knowledge is like the light of a torch, but your ignorance is like total **Cimmerian** darkness. Job 26:14, **How little a portion is known of God?** The Septuagint translates it, **How little a drop!** Trying to fully grasp the Deity is like trying to measure the ocean with your hand. Christians, the greatest part of your knowledge does not even equal the smallest part of your ignorance. This should tear down every proud imagination. You have no reason to be proud of what you know. Instead, be humbled by what you lack.

5. Consider what a pit of sin you carry within you. Sin is the **cursed thing**. Joshua 7:13. It is the essence of evil. It is like a stain on beauty. It was pictured by the **unclean cloth**, which was the most impure thing under the Law. What good is knowledge when sin darkens it? It is like a woman with a beautiful face but cancer in her chest. Your knowledge does not adorn you nearly as much as sin degrades you.

6. Grace can never thrive where self-conceit grows. Just as a body cannot thrive when swollen with disease, the soul cannot thrive when it is swelled with this disease of pride and self-conceit. A proud head produces a barren heart.

7. An arrogant, self-important attitude is offensive and greatly reduces any real worth in a person. It is like a flaw in a diamond. The more someone values himself, the less God and the angels value him. A person may be talented, but if he is full of self-conceit, no one wants to be around him. He is like a doctor who has the plague -- people may admire his skill, but no one wants to come near him.

8. Those who have an inflated opinion of their own gifts are on the road to ruin. Either God makes them foolish, or He withholds His blessing from their work, or He allows them to fall into some great sin. **Peter**, who was so confident in himself -- as if he had more grace than all the other Apostles combined -- the Lord allowed him to fall hard. He denied Christ with an oath and even a curse, **Matthew** 26:74. **Peter** called down a curse on himself, swearing he did not know Christ. Some think he even cursed Christ.

The Lord sometimes lets vain, conceited people fall not only **shamefully** but **permanently**. The doves (says **Pliny**) take pride in their feathers and in flying high. Eventually they soar so high that they become prey to the hawk. In the same way, when people soar high in self-conceit, they become prey to the **Prince of the Air**. Let all this drive us to deny ourselves and kill the worm of self-conceit. If we are proud of our knowledge, the Devil does not care how much we know. Let Saint **Paul** be our example. Though he was **the chief of the Apostles**, he called himself **the least of Saints**. Ephesians 3:8 and 2 Corinthians 12:11. **Though I be nothing**. This brilliant Apostle, a star of the highest rank, shrank into nothing in his own eyes. It is excellent to be like **Moses**, whose face had a glow on it, but **he did not know that the skin of his face was shining**, Exodus 34:29.

6. A Christian must deny his **appetite**. The physical appetite has an insatiable hunger -- it constantly cries **give, give**. Saint **Paul** disciplined **his body**, 1 Corinthians 9:27. We should only take enough food and drink to sustain the body so that it can serve God. -- **More are harmed by excess in lawful things than by involvement in unlawful ones** -- Just as more people are

killed by wine than by poison. Many make their **Belly their god**, Philippians 3:19. And to this god they pour out drink offerings. **Clement of Alexandria** writes about a fish whose heart is in its belly -- a picture of pleasure-seekers whose heart is in their stomach, devoted to indulgence. Excess in food or drink clouds the mind, smothers good desires, and stirs up lust. The thickest weeds grow in the richest soil. Overindulgence shortens life, just as too much oil puts out the lamp. Many dig their own graves with their teeth. Christ warned His Apostles, Luke 21:34. **Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be weighed down with overeating and drunkenness.** **Seneca** could say he was born for higher things than to be a slave to his body. What a disgrace it is that the soul -- that noble thing which holds the scepter of reason and is related to the angels -- should be enslaved to the animal part! Deny the sinful cravings of the flesh. What has God given conscience for, if not to be a golden bridle to restrain the unruly appetite?

7. A Christian must deny his **comfort and ease**, Proverbs 1:23. **Ease kills the foolish.** The flesh is full of laziness and softness. It hates to work hard for Heaven. Proverbs 19:24, **A lazy man buries his hand in his pocket.** He will not pull it out even to grab a crown. Weeds and pests grow in untended ground, and every kind of vice grows in an idle, untended heart. How can those who never planted any seed expect to reap a harvest of glory? Is Satan so busy in his territory, 1 **Peter** 5:8, while Christians sit idle? Are they **Like the Lilies which toil not, neither do they spin?** Deny your comfort and ease! **Seneca**, a pagan, devoted himself to hard work and spent part of the night in study. **Hannibal** forced his way over the **Alps** and their jagged

rocks. We must force our way into paradise. Let us shake off laziness the way **Paul** shook off the viper. Never think you will be carried into Heaven the way passengers on a ship are carried to port while sleeping. 1 Chronicles 22:16. **Arise and get to work.** God draws no distinction between the **lazy** servant and the wicked one. Matthew 25:26. Those people in **Etruria** who, like drones, entered the hive and consumed the honey were expelled from the community and condemned to exile. Those who waste the day of grace and **fold their hands to sleep** when they should be **working out salvation** -- God will condemn them to a permanent exile in Hell.

8. A Christian must deny sinful scheming. This is **the wisdom of the flesh**, 2 Corinthians 1:12. Sinful scheming is **craftiness**. The schemer does not ask what is **right**, but what is **safe**. The schemer is made of **willow** -- he can bend with any party. His religion is tailored to fit the fashion of the times. He can bow either to the **East** or to the **Host**. Zeal for truth is deleted from the schemer's creed. Sir **Thomas More** once said he would not follow truth too closely, for fear it would knock out his brains. Some think it is shrewd not to speak against error, for fear of losing allies. The schemer is a **Latitudinarian**. He has more rationalizations than **Aquinas** and can stomach things that make others tremble. The ostrich's wings help it outrun other creatures. Sinful scheming helps people run further ahead than those with purer consciences. In short, the schemer is an **Ecebolius**. Like the **Chameleon**, he can change into any color and become whatever his company requires. He can be either serious or frivolous. He can imitate either **Cato** or **Catiline**. I agree that Christian wisdom is commendable,

but the **Serpent** must not swallow the **Dove**. Any scheming that teaches you to avoid duty is unjustifiable. Deny sinful scheming. Dare to be honest. The best strategy is to **hold fast to integrity**.

9. A Christian must deny his **uncontrolled passions**. James 1:26, **If any man among you seems to be religious, and does not bridle his tongue, this man's religion is worthless**. Every part of the body is infected with sin, just as every branch of wormwood is bitter. But the tongue is **full of deadly poison**, James 3:8. Saint **Augustine** compares the tongue to a **furnace**, and too often, hot sparks of anger fly out of it. The Holy Spirit once descended **in divided tongues of fire**, Acts 2:3. But the Apostle **James** speaks of a tongue that is **set on fire by Hell**, chapter 3:6. Some people cannot control their own spirit. They are carried away by their passions like a chariot pulled by wild horses. Many (says **Jerome**) who would never get drunk on wine become drunk on reckless anger. Ecclesiastes 7:9, **Anger rests in the heart of fools**. Anger may visit a wise person, but it takes up residence in a fool. There is, I know, a holy anger against sin. But the fury of uncontrolled passion is the filthy froth that boils over from a corrupt heart. Passion disrupts reason and makes a person unfit for holy duties. Hot passions make cold prayers. Christians, deny yourselves! Pray that God will **set a guard over your lips**, Psalm 141:4. Work to put out the fire of anger with a flood of tears. It is recorded of Mr. **John Bruen** in the County Palatine of **Chester** that, although he was naturally hot-tempered, he eventually gained victory over his passions and grew so gentle and calm that his very nature seemed completely changed. Grace does to our passions what Christ did to the sea when it was storming. Mark

4:39, He said, **Peace, be still**, and **there was a great calm**. Grace turns the fierceness of the lion into the gentleness of the dove.

10. A Christian must deny his **sinful fashions**. Romans 12:2, **Be not conformed to this World** -- that is, to its style and trends. If the early Christians rose from their graves, our strange fashions might frighten them back into them. Was there ever such excess **in Hair?** 1 Corinthians 11:24, **If a man have long hair it is a shame**. More money is sometimes spent on a wig for one head than would clothe twenty poor people. Once someone asked the Reverend Mr. **Dod** why he did not preach against those who wore long hair. He replied: If Grace enters their heart, it will make them cut their hair.

Nor can women be excused for their excess in clothing. **Seneca** complained about people in his day who hung two or three fortunes from their ears. Some people wear half their wealth on their backs. **Lysander** would not allow his daughters to dress too lavishly, saying it would not make them so much **attractive** as **common**. What spotted faces and bare shoulders appear in the congregations! And the fact that professing Christians copy others in their outlandish outfits is a disgrace to religion. A tear in the eye would be more beautiful than a tower on the forehead. Deny yourselves! Pull down these flags of vanity. Have God's judgments not yet humbled you? 1 Timothy 2:9, **I will therefore that women adorn themselves with modest apparel: let the hidden person of the heart** be beautified and decorated with grace. Psalm 45:13, **The King's daughter is all glorious within**.

11. A Christian must deny **his own ambitions**. He must not look sideways in religion and aim at himself more than at God. He must not aim at enriching himself or winning applause for himself.

1. He must not aim at **enriching himself**. Some embrace the Gospel only for profit. They court this Queen not for her beauty, but for her jewels. It is not **the fire of the altar** they care about, but **the gold of the altar**, 1 Timothy 6:5, **Supposing that gain is godliness**. **Camero**, a French theologian from **Bordeaux**, tells of one **Santangel**, a lawyer, who became a Protestant only for worldly advantage, so that he might grow rich. **Judas** preached and worked miracles, but his eye was mainly on the **money bag**. How many pile one church position on top of another, caring more about the profit than the people! **Mute dogs are greedy dogs**, **Isaiah** 56:10, 11. These men use the ministry only as a net to catch advancement. This is to be worldly in the handling of sacred things. It is cheap and unworthy of a Christian to make religion serve selfish financial interests.

2. A Christian must not aim at **self-applause**. The Pharisees, who were creatures obsessed with glory, were guilty of this. They prayed and gave to the poor **so that they might be seen by others**, Matthew 6. The oil of vanity fueled their lamp. Verse 5: **Truly they have their reward**. They could write out their receipt and mark it, **Received in full payment**. **Spanhemius** once said that there is in every person by nature a dose of Pharisaism -- a craving for the glory and applause of the world. **Luther** confessed that although he was never tempted by greed, he was sometimes tempted by vain glory. Christ's own disciples were arguing about **who should be greatest**. What a powerful temptation this desire for vain glory is! Moths breed in the finest

cloth, and self-seeking tends to breed in the best duties. Hidden selfish motives corrupt religion. A good motive will not make a bad action good, but a bad motive will make a good action bad.

Those who take credit for themselves after performing some great service in the Church deserve blame. They are like the pagans who sacrificed the wax to their gods but kept the honey for themselves. **Matthew Paris** tells of a man who, in several lectures, powerfully proved that Christ was God. When the audience praised him highly, he cried out, **O Jesus, You are indebted to me for Your Divinity this day.** At that moment, this scholar was suddenly struck with such confusion and memory loss that he could never again recite the Lord's Prayer without a small child saying it to him. Let this produce trembling and humility in Christians. Several ships that have escaped the rocks have been wrecked on the sandbars. Many who have escaped the rocks of obvious scandals have been wrecked on the sandbars of self-seeking. One person said he would not want **Erasmus's** fame and applause for anything in the world. It is not wrong to have a good reputation in God's Church -- that is a blessing. Hebrews 11:2, **By faith the elders obtained a good report.** Much of the honor of religion depends on the reputation of those who profess it. But the sin is when self-applause becomes the only thing pursued. Popular praise is a golden arrow that glitters in the eye but wounds the heart. How many have been blown into Hell by the wind of popular applause!

Let us deny -- and even despise -- this craving for vain glory. We have an excellent example in **John the Baptist**, who sought to lift up Christ and lower himself. John 1:15, **He that comes after me is preferred before me.** It was as if he said: I am only

the **Herald, the voice of one crying**. Christ who comes after me is the Prince. I am only the morning star; He is the Sun. I baptize only with **water**; He baptizes with the **Holy Spirit**. In this way he placed the crown of honor on Christ's head. Just as **Joab**, after capturing **Rabbah**, did not claim the credit for himself but sent for King **David** so that the king could receive the glory of the victory, 2 **Samuel** 12:27. In the same way, when any great service has been accomplished in Church or nation, all the glory should be given to Christ and free grace. It is better to have God's approval than the world's applause. If we are faithful, we will have more than enough honor in Heaven. Let our chief aim in every duty be this: that we may grow more in love with God, become more like Him, have deeper fellowship with Him, and bring more glory to Him. 1 Peter 4:11, **That in all things, God may be glorified**. We should not only **promote** God's glory but **pursue** it as our goal. It was a worthy statement by **Philip de Mornay** on his deathbed: that throughout the course of his life, he had made God's glory his purpose and aim. As all the rivers flow into the sea, so all our actions must flow into God, the Infinite Ocean.

12. A Christian must deny all **ungodliness**. Titus 2:11, 12, **The grace of God has appeared to all men, Teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly**, etc. The **Turks** say in their **Quran** that God did not give men lustful desires only to have them go unfulfilled. But let their **Quran** go with the Papists' **legend**. Scripture grants no permission for sin. It commands us to deny **ungodly lusts**. The person who will not sacrifice the **ram** -- his vile lusts -- is unlikely to sacrifice his **Isaac** -- his worldly profits. A Christian must deny his malice, revenge, covetousness, sexual immorality, superstition,

and false doctrine. A person can go to Hell just as easily for holding a sinful belief as for living a sinful life. And let me especially highlight two sins a Christian must deny.

1. The sin of **harsh judging**, James 4:11, **Do not speak evil of one another**. Some make it part of their religion to criticize others and clip their reputation to make it weigh less. You will hear them say: that person is proud, divisive, hypocritical. James 4:12, **Who are you to judge another?** Saint **Augustine** could not stand it when people attacked the good name of others. So he wrote these two lines on his dining table:

Whoever loves to tear apart the reputation of those who are absent should know that this table is off-limits to him.

The root of harsh judging is **pride**. A person thinks that by tearing down another's reputation, he can build up his own. But let him beware who raises himself on the ruins of another person's good name. Do you think it is no sin to murder someone's reputation? You who are so quick to criticize -- it is likely that you can spot every fault but your own. Like the **Lamiae**, who could see well outside their home but were blind inside it. Christian, look inward! If you examined your own flaws more carefully in the mirror of the Word, you would not be so quick to throw the **stone** of criticism at others. Deny this sin of harsh judging, or **striking with the tongue**, Jeremiah 18:18. You who speak badly about your brother without cause -- the time may come when he is accepted and you are rejected. He may prove to be **gold**, and you **worthless metal**.

2. A Christian must deny his **favorite sin**, his **pet transgression**. Psalm 18:23, **I have kept myself from my iniquity**. Just as there is one queen bee in the hive, there is naturally one ruling sin in the heart, and this must be denied. The Devil can hold a person captive by just one sin. A jailer can hold a prisoner with just one chain. One sin is enough to block the flow of mercy. One sin can condemn just as easily as many. A single millstone is enough to sink a person into the sea. If there is any sinful desire we refuse to give up, it will be a **bitter root** that leads either to disgrace or to falling away from the faith.

13. A Christian must deny his **relationships**. Luke 14:26, **If any man come to Me, and hate not father, and mother, and wife, and children, he cannot be My disciple**. The meaning is this: when earthly relationships compete with or stand against Christ, we must set them aside. When our friends become traps and try to keep us from doing our duty, we must either leap over them or push past them. Here, hatred toward loved ones is really devotion toward God. If my wife (said **Jerome**) should hang around my neck, if my mother should show me the breast that nursed me, and they tried to persuade me to deny Christ, I would break away from them and run to the Cross. When **Peter** tried to be a tempter, Christ said, **Get behind Me, Satan**.

14. A Christian must deny his **possessions** for Christ. A worldly heart will praise Christ and claim to follow Him but will part with nothing for Him. The young man in the Gospel was Christ's **listener** but not His **follower**. He approved of heavenly things but craved earthly ones. When Christ told him, **Sell all and give to the poor**, he went away sad, **he went away sorrowful**, Matthew 19:22. When **Mercury** is in alignment with a harmful

planet, it has a harmful influence. In the same way, when riches are joined with a corrupt heart, they do great damage. The world was closer to the young man's heart than Christ. Have some of the pagans denied the world? **Epaminondas**, a **Greek** captain who won many great victories, was a great despiser of worldly wealth. He refused vast sums of money sent to him from the King of **Persia**, so that when he died, he left barely enough to pay for his funeral. If a pagan went this far in denying the world, should not Christians go much further? Let the **gold bar** be given up for the **pearl of great price**. Matthew 19:27, **We have forsaken all, and followed You**. A true saint values even the leftovers of Christ more than the world's best harvest. Philippians 3:8, **For whom I have suffered the loss of all things**. **Galeacius**, Marquess of **Vico**, gave up a large estate to enjoy the pure worship of Christ **at Geneva**. When a Jesuit tried to persuade him to return to his Catholic religion in **Italy**, promising him a huge sum of money, he said, **Let their money perish with them who consider all the gold in the world worth one hour's fellowship with Jesus Christ and His Holy Spirit**.

15. A Christian must deny his **life** for Christ. This is in the text: **Let him take up his Cross**. Suffering for Christ must be free and willing. The person who suffers unwillingly merely **carries** the Cross. The person who suffers willingly **takes up** the Cross. A beautiful young woman fell in love with **Crates** for his learning. He showed her his **walking stick** and his **bag** and said: This is your dowry. Christ shows us His **Cross**. If we will not accept Him on these terms, the arrangement will not go forward. Sufferings will **come to us**. 2 Timothy 3:12. The Devil has not grown kinder than he used to be. Some dream of reigning with Christ but not of

suffering. **Joseph** dreamed of his **promotion** but not of his **imprisonment**. The flesh cries out that the Cross is painful -- there are nails in the yoke that tear. But life must be **denied**, even **hated** for Christ. Luke 14:26, **If any man come to Me, and hate not father, and mother, and his own life, he cannot be My disciple**. Love for Christ must outweigh love for life. **Revelation 12:11, They loved not their lives to the death**. **Paul** carried the **image** of Christ in his heart as a saint, the **message** of Christ in his mouth as a minister, and the **marks** of Christ in his body as a martyr. **Galatians 6:17**. The heroes of the early church seized their torments as if they were crowns and gladly shed their blood for Christ, knowing they would exchange their bloodstained clothes for white robes. The prophet **Isaiah** was killed with a saw, **Jeremiah** with stones, **Amos** with an iron bar, **Luke** was hanged on an olive tree. I have read that **Irenaeus** was brought to a place where a Cross stood on one side and an idol on the other. He was given a choice: bow to the idol or suffer on the Cross. He chose the Cross. **Basil** tells of a young woman condemned to the fire who, when offered her life and her property if she would bow to an image, answered, **Let life and money go. Welcome, Christ**. Though every Christian is not actually a martyr, every Christian has a prepared mind and is ready to suffer if God calls. **Luther** said he would rather be a **Martyr** than a **Monarch**. Let us then take up the Cross. Can wicked people willingly suffer for their sinful desires, while we will not suffer for Christ? We should view our suffering as a badge of **honor**. If we receive a **Spirit of God and of glory** when we are **insulted** for Christ, how much more when we **die** for Him. 1 Peter 4:14. Our suffering for Christ spreads the faith. **Paul's** imprisonment caused

the Gospel to advance even further. Philippians 1:12. **Justin Martyr** was converted to the faith by witnessing the heroic patience and courage of Christians in their suffering. -- **Let us suffer so that we may gain** -- The Cross leads to the Crown. 2 Timothy 2:12, **If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him.** Who would refuse to brave the rough and stormy seas if he knew he would be crowned the moment he reached the shore? Persecutors may take our goods but not our God, our freedom but not our freedom of conscience, our head but not our Crown. **Revelation 2:10.**

Whoever cannot deny his life for Christ will end up denying Christ. And whoever is ashamed of Christ, Christ will be ashamed of him. Mark 8:38. **Whoever shall be ashamed of Me and My words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with His holy Angels.**

CHAPTER 3: CONTAINING THE GROUND OF THE PROPOSITION



CHAPTER 3. THE FOUNDATION OF THE PROPOSITION.

The main reason we must deny ourselves is that we can be saved no other way. A town or castle may have several roads leading to it, but there is only one road that leads to the heavenly paradise, and that is self-denial. Without self-denial, we can never meet Christ's requirements. If the world is not denied, Christ cannot be loved. If self-righteousness is not denied, Christ cannot be trusted. If the will is not denied, Christ cannot be obeyed. Therefore self-denial is as absolutely necessary as Heaven itself.

CHAPTER 4: AN INFERENCE DRAWN FROM THE PROPOSITION



CHAPTER 4. A LESSON DRAWN FROM THE PROPOSITION.

From everything that has been said, see how hard it is to be a true Christian. If it were only a matter of putting on the outward appearance of faith, it would be easy -- even **Satan can disguise himself as an Angel of light**, 2 Corinthians 11:14. But a person must deny himself. This self-emptying, this self-surrender, is the **Narrow Gate** through which a Christian must enter the Kingdom of God. He must deny not only what is **outside him** -- his worldly profits -- but also what is **inside him** -- his **sins**, and even **his own righteousness**. **Self** is an **Idol**, and it is hard to sacrifice this idol. But it must be done. Either **sinful** self must be denied, or the **whole** self will be damned.

CHAPTER 5: A CHECK TO EPICURES AND SENSUALISTS



CHAPTER 5. A REBUKE TO PLEASURE-SEEKERS AND INDULGENT PEOPLE.

This rightly convicts those who live in direct contradiction to the text -- who, instead of denying themselves, throw off all restraint and give themselves over to every kind of pleasure and loose living. Ecclesiastes 7:4, **The heart of fools is in the house of pleasure.** The prophet describes those who do not **put to death** their sinful desires but instead **feed** them. Amos 6:4, 5, **That lie upon beds of Ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, that sing idle songs to the sound of the harp, that drink wine in bowls,** etc. Pleasure, like **Circe**, enchants people's minds and turns them into beasts. There is a place in **Africa** called **Tombutium** where the inhabitants spend all their time piping and dancing. Do we not have many who waste their hours the same way -- in entertainment and vice? As if God had made them like the **Leviathan, to play in the water,** Psalm 104:26. How will their faces change when God says, **Give an account of your stewardship!** These carefree pleasure-seekers live as though there were no world to come. They pamper their

bodies but starve their souls. It is as if someone fed his slave while starving his wife. Do these indulgent people deny themselves? In one sense they do -- for by chasing their sinful desires, they deny themselves a place in Heaven. In the country of **Sardinia** there is an herb like balm that, if eaten in large amounts, causes a person to die laughing. Pleasure is such an herb. If someone feeds on it without restraint, he will go laughing all the way to Hell. **Esau** lost his blessing while he was out hunting. How many people, while hunting after worldly pleasures, lose true blessedness! There is a bitter cup being prepared that will spoil the sinner's celebration. Psalm 75:8, **In the hand of the Lord there is a cup, the wine is red, it is full of mixture.** This wine is the wrath of God, and it is **mixed** -- the **worm** and the **fire** help to mix the cup. The Lord will measure the sinner's torment to match his pleasure. Revelation 18:7, **How much she has lived in luxury, so much torment and sorrow give her.**

CHAPTER 6: THE WANT OF SELF-DENIAL LAMENTED



CHAPTER 6. THE LACK OF SELF-DENIAL MOURNED.

Next, we should grieve over the absence of self-denial. Where has self-denial gone? **Justice has left the earth.** We live in a **knowledgeable** age, yet few know how to deny themselves. **Selfishness** is the ruling sin of the world. This is what makes the times look so bleak. **2 Timothy 3:1, 2, Perilous times shall come, for men shall be lovers of themselves. Self** could have many **charges** brought against it. It is an enemy of the public good. **Where do wars come from?** James 4:1. Where do robbery and bribery come from? Where do oppression and fraud come from, if not from selfish desires that people cannot conquer? When **Lentulus** named **Tiberius Caesar** as his heir in his will, Caesar was so shamelessly selfish that he had **Lentulus** killed so he could take immediate possession of his goods. Self-denial lives in very few hearts. It is a rare and sacred plant that has become very scarce. Luke 18:8, **When the Son of Man comes, shall He find faith on the earth?** Could we not also ask, **Shall He find self-denial on the earth?** Self-denial has gone on a long journey, and who can tell when it will return?

CHAPTER 7: CONTAINING A SUASIVE TO SELF-DENIAL



CHAPTER 7. AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO PRACTICE SELF-DENIAL.

My next task is to urge Christians to **practice** this crucial duty of self-denial. Humanity was first lost through self-exaltation, and we must be recovered through self-denial.

1. Self-denial is just and fair. How much has Christ denied Himself for us? He hid His glory. Philippians 2:7. **He emptied Himself.** What amazing self-denial it was for Christ to leave His Father's embrace and take on human flesh! For Christ to become flesh was a greater descent than if all the angels had been turned into worms. Christ denied His name and reputation. Hebrews 12:2, **He endured the shame.** He denied worldly greatness and riches. 1 Corinthians 8:9. **For our sakes He became poor.** The manger was His cradle and the cobwebs His curtains. He denied His life. Philippians 2:8, **He became obedient to death.** It is only fair that we deny ourselves for Christ.

2. Self-denial is the mark of a genuine Christian. Hypocrites may have great knowledge and put on a fine show, but only the genuine saint can deny himself and lay his life at Christ's feet. This was the proof of **Moses'** sincerity: he denied the pleasures of the royal court and chose suffering over sin, **Hebrews** 11:25. I have read about a godly man who was once tempted by Satan. Satan said to him: Why do you go through all this trouble? What do you do that is more than what I do? Are you no drunkard, no adulterer? Neither am I. Do you stay awake and keep watch? I never sleep. Do you fast? I never eat. What do you do that is more than I do? The godly man replied: I will tell you, Satan. I give myself to prayer. And more than that -- I deny myself. At that, the Devil said: Now you have gone beyond me, for I exalt myself. And he vanished.

3. Self-denial is a **reasonable** thing. If **self** is an **enemy**, then it is wise to get rid of it. There is a **logic** behind all God's commands. Why does He want us to deny **sinful desires**? Because **They war against our souls**, 1 Peter 2:11. Why does He want us to deny pride? Because of its destructive nature. Proverbs 16:18, **Pride goes before destruction**. Where pride leads the way, destruction follows close behind. God asks us to deny nothing for Him except what will destroy us if we keep it.

4. Nothing is lost by self-denial. We will be richly rewarded. Matthew 19:29, **Everyone that has forsaken houses, and lands for My sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall inherit life everlasting**. If we deny our name and reputation for Christ, God will give us inward peace -- there is a **hundredfold** in this life -- and will honor us before the angels. How many hundredfold that amounts to, I cannot calculate. If we deny our pos-

sessions to keep our conscience clear, God will give us a Kingdom. **Luke 12:32.** What does a person lose who gives up a flower and gains a jewel? We may lose everything we have for Christ, yet lose nothing by Him.

CHAPTER 8: CONTAINING HELPS TO SELF-DENIAL



CHAPTER 8. PRACTICAL HELPS FOR SELF-DENIAL.

To develop self-denial, follow these guidelines.

1. Become convinced of the incomparable **excellence** of Christ. He has equality and shared nature with God the Father, **Colossians** 2:9. He is the purest expression of goodness. He is compared to a **Head of gold** for His riches, **Song of Solomon** 5:10. He is compared to the **Rose of Sharon** for His fragrance, **Song of Solomon** 2:1. He is compared to a **bright morning star** for His beauty, **Revelation** 22:16. Jesus Christ is everything God can require for satisfaction and everything we can desire for salvation. He is perfectly matched to our needs. He has **eye-salve** to heal our vision, **White robes** to cover us, and the balm of His Blood to heal us.

We will never deny ourselves for Christ until we see His glory and beauty. Christ is all richness and sweetness. He is better than life, better than wealth, better than Heaven itself.

2. Pursue a **living principle** of Grace. Grace will do what **human effort** cannot. A person may accomplish by skill what he cannot accomplish by brute strength. A heavy load that cannot be lifted by arm strength can be lifted with screws and pulleys. Grace will teach the skill of self-denial, which raw human nature cannot achieve. In particular, work to develop three graces:

1. **Humility.** A proud person admires himself and therefore cannot deny himself. A humble person lays his face in the dust. He thinks less of himself than others do of him. He goes outside himself, he gives up his claims on himself, he opens himself to God like a flower opens to the sun. He will do whatever God wants him to do and be whatever God wants him to be. He is like melting wax -- God may press whatever stamp and impression He wants on him. The humble person is the self-denier.

2. **Love.** Who would not deny himself for a friend he loves? He will give up anything he has. He will do whatever pleases the one he loves, even at his own cost. The person whose heart burns with love for Christ will stop at nothing for His sake. **Gregory Nazianzen** said of his **Athenian** education that he was glad to have something valuable to count as worthless for Christ. Love for God would swallow up self-love.

3. **Faith. Abraham** was a great self-denier. He left his family and his country and traveled wherever God directed him. Where did this come from? It came from his faith. Hebrews 11:8, **By faith Abraham obeyed, and went out, not knowing where he was going.** The person who believes Christ is his and Heaven is his -- what will he not give up for Christ's sake? The stronger a Christian's faith, the greater his self-denial will be.

3. **Pray** earnestly for self-denial. Prayer puts God to work, **Psalm 10:17**. Some pray for **assurance** but lack **self-denial** -- as if God would put His seal on a blank page. Let this be your greatest request: a self-denying heart. Self-denial does not grow naturally. It is a **fruit of the Spirit**. Ask God to plant this heavenly flower in your soul. Say: Lord, whatever You deny me, do not deny me self-denial. Let me lack great abilities. Let me even lack the comforts of the Spirit. But do not let me lack self-denial. There may be a way to Heaven without comfort, but there is no way to Heaven without self-denial.

THANKS FOR READING



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