

Self-Losing

by Richard Baxter (1615-1691)

“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.”

—Luke 9:23-24

CONSIDER: self-seeking is self-destroying, and self-denial is the only way to our safety. We were well when we were in the hands of God [in the Garden of Eden before the Fall] and had no need to care for ourselves. But we were lost as soon as we left Him and turned to ourselves. If God cares for you, [then] Infinite Wisdom cares for you—Whom no enemy is able to overwit or circumvent; Who can foresee all your dangers, and is acquainted with all the ways of your enemies and with all that is necessary to your preservation. But if you be at your own care, you are at the care of fools and short-witted people—[who] are not acquainted with the depths of Satan, the subtleties of men, nor the way of your escape, but may easily be overreached¹ to your undoing! If you are in your own hands, you are in the hands of bad men who, though they have self-love, yet are so blinded by impiety that they will live like self-haters!

And this experience fully manifests² in that all sinners are self-destroyers; no enemy could do so much against us as the best of us does against himself. If a man hates himself as bad as the devil hates him, he could show it by no worse a way than sin; nor do himself a greater mischief than by neglecting God and the life to come, and undoing his own soul as the ungodly do. Should you sit down of purpose to study how to do all the hurt to yourselves that you can, and to play the part of your deadliest enemies, I know not what you could do more than is ordinary with ungodly men to do, except to go a little further in the same way.

Nothing but sin could alienate you from God or make you liable to His heavy wrath; and this no other man could make you guilty of, if you did not voluntarily choose to be evil. If you could ask any man who is this day in hell, or who will ever be there, what brought him thither, and who it was long of³ that he came to such a miserable end, he

¹ **overreached** – deceived by cunning; cheated.

² **manifests** – is made visible.

³ **long of** – by means of; owing to.

must needs⁴ tell you it was himself. If you come to any in earthly misery and ask them, “who brought this upon you?”—if they speak truly they must say it was themselves.

This will be a great aggravation of their misery, and the fuel that will feed the unquenchable fire: to think that all this was their own doing, and that they had not been deprived of the heavenly glory but for their own refusal or neglect.⁵ It will fill the soul with an everlasting indignation against itself, to consider that it hath cast itself willfully into such misery that—when Satan could not, and men could not, and God would not, if he had not done it himself—he should be so witless and graceless as to be the chooser of sin, the refuser of holiness, and his own undoer.

So the experience of all the world tells you how unsafe man is in his own hands. The experience of those in hell may tell us whither it is that self would lead us if we follow its conduct. Whither did self lead Adam when he hearkened to it but to sin and death? What work hath it trade⁶ over all the earth! Do we not see a whole world of people, not one excepted: wounded, slain, and brought into so low and sad a state—and all this by themselves? And yet shall we go on in selfishness still?

Of all the enemies you have in the world, pray God to save you from yourselves; escape [from] yourselves and you shall escape all. You will never miscarry by any other hands. The devil and wicked men will do their worst, but without you they can do nothing. Never will you come to hell if you run not yourselves thither; never will you be shut out of heaven if you run not from it by your own neglect—and prefer not the prosperity of the world before it.

Therefore, you see that we are nowhere more unsafe than in our own hands! God’s will is good and would make a good choice for us; but our wills are bad and will make a bad choice for themselves. God is unchangeable and the same forever; but we are giddy and uncertain: if we are in a good mind today, [we] are in danger of being in a bad [mind] tomorrow. God is able to secure us against all the subtlety, rage, and power of earth or hell; but we are silly, impotent worms, and unable to defend ourselves or to accomplish our own desires. Thus, our safety consists in forsaking ourselves and cleaving to the Lord (Luk 14:33). The more your happiness lies in your own hands, the greater is your danger; and the more it is in the hands of God, the greater is your safety.

Fly, therefore, from yourselves to God, as you would fly out of a torn or sinking vessel into the strongest ship; or as you would haste away from a tottering house that is ready to fall upon your heads—so haste away from self to God. Study His love, fall in love with Him, and that will be more gainful to you than studying and carnally loving yourselves. Forget yourselves and remember Him—and He will remember you to your greater advantage than if you had remembered yourselves.

⁴ **must needs** – is required; of necessity.

⁵ **their own refusal or neglect** – The author is emphasizing everyone’s personal responsibility to turn to Christ. God’s sovereignty and human responsibility are both truths of Scripture.

⁶ **trade** – exchanged; wrought.

When any interest of your own rises up against the interest or will of God, care not then for yourselves or for your own. Set as light by it as if it were worth nothing; and say as the three witnesses of God when they were ready to be cast into a flaming furnace, “We are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up” (Dan 3:16-18).

Care you for your duty,⁷ and God will care for your safety better than you can do. You are safer under God’s care in the midst of a flaming fire than under your own care in the greatest prosperity or honour in the world. While Abraham and Isaac depended upon God, they were safe though in the midst of dangers; but when they fell upon carnal shifting⁸ for themselves—to say their wives were their sisters (Gen 12:14-19, 20:1-5, 26:6-9)—they brought themselves into a snare and double danger. When you have cared, contrived, and shifted for yourselves as long as you can, it is God that must do the deed [to] defend, deliver, and provide for you when all is done.

Is it wise, safe, or profitable for your child to be casting for provision of meat, drink, and clothes for itself? Cannot you do it better? And is it not your work? And had you not rather your child would trust you with it, and meddle with his own business, and be careful to please you, and then to depend on your care and love? What good will it do a simple patient to know the ingredients of every medicine compounded for him and given by his physician—or to desire to be acquainted with his physic⁹ himself? He may be tampering with his own body, and have the doing of the business himself, till by his unskillfulness he has undone himself, when he had a wise and faithful physician that he might have trusted?

Oh that men knew how ready a way it is to their undoing when they must be satisfied of all the reasons of the ways of God; when they must have their own wills and ways, and must see a ground of safety in the creature, and must take that course that self tells them is the best; when they are resolved to look to their estates, honours, and lives, and dare not cast them on the wisdom, care, and will of God! O that men knew how sure and near a way it is to their felicity¹⁰ to be contented to be nothing that God may be all—and then they would be more in God than they could have been in themselves! And to be contented to die that they may live in God; and to lose their lives that they may find them in Him.

Let go your reputation with men, and you will find it made up a thousandfold in the approbation¹¹ of God. Let men condemn you, so that God may justify you! Let riches go,

⁷ **care you for your duty** – be dedicated to your God-given responsibilities, fulfilling the work He has given you to do.

⁸ **carnal shifting** – “looking out for number one”; fleshly selfishness.

⁹ **physic** – medicine.

¹⁰ **felicity** – happiness; blessedness; state of well-being.

¹¹ **approbation** – approval.

and see whether you will not find more in God than you could possibly lose for Him. Can any man be a loser by God? Or can he make an ill bargain¹² that makes sure of heaven? Do you think there is any want¹³ of riches or honour there? Oh sirs, win God and win all; win heaven and never fear being losers!

It seems a great loss to flesh and blood to lay down your estates, honour, and life for Christ and the hopes of a life to come; but it is because the flesh is blind and cannot see so far off as everlasting is. The loss is not so great as to exchange your brass [and] dirt for gold and jewels, or to exchange your sickness for health. It is most profitable...to put all your stock into God's hand, venturing it all on His service upon the confidence of His promise. But if you will go about to shift for yourselves, you will lose yourselves; and if you will save yourselves, you will undo yourselves (Mat 16:25); and if you will keep your riches or honours, you do but cast them away—for all is lost that is saved from God, and that is best saved that is lost for God (Mar 10:29-30; Luk 8:8)! ❧

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¹² **ill bargain** – poor trade, where one gives up more than he gets in return.

¹³ **want** – lack.