**Adult Sunday School**

October 28, 2007

**The last measuring**

Micah 7:7

Amos 7:7 Thus he shewed me: and, behold, the Lord stood upon a wall made by a plumbline, with a plumbline in his hand.

8 And the LORD said unto me, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A plumbline. Then said the Lord, **Behold, I will set a plumbline** in the midst of my people Israel: **I will not again pass by them any more:**

1. **Divine Inspection**
   1. He will defer his judgment no longer.
   2. God’s Plumb line was on their wall

**God would now visit them according to their iniquities with Strict justice.**

7:7-9 The plumb line as a line of judgment

Isa. 28:17 The line is God’s judgment - The plummet is God’s righteousness

Jer 51:13 O thou that dwellest upon many waters, abundant in treasures, thine end is come, and the measure of thy covetousness.

Na 1:3 The LORD is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked: the LORD hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet.

Col 2:8 Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

* 1. The same plumb line is on your wall

I Cor.3:1-3;13:11; 14:20; Eph.4:14; IPt.2:2-12

Heb.5:11-6:1

Heb 5:12 For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be **the first principles of the oracles of God**; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.

Mt 28:20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you:

**The First Principles of the Oracles of God**

**The Duty of Self-Denial**

by Thomas Watson, 1675

Christian Reader,  
The weightiness of the argument here discoursed on justly merits a larger volume. But I have contracted it, so that it may possibly come into more hands. I must profess I do not know a more necessary point in divinity. *Self-denial is the first principle of Christianity!* It is the life-blood which must run through the whole body of piety. Self-denial is not learned at an academy, but from the oracles of Scripture.

It is my request to the reader to pursue this manual with seriousness, knowing that the practice of self-denial is that wherein his salvation is nearly concerned. "May the Lord work with His Word and cause the dew of His blessing to fall with this manna," is the prayer of,  
Your Friend and Servant in the Gospel,  
Thomas Watson, 1675

**1. Exposition of the verse.**

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

"All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." 2 Timothy 3:16. The Word is compared to a lamp for its *illuminating* quality, Psalm 119:105, and to refined silver for its *enriching* quality, Psalm 12:6. Among other parts of sacred writ, this is not the least, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself."

These words are dropped from the lips of Christ, the oracle of truth. In the preceding verse, our blessed Savior foretold His suffering, "The Son of Man must suffer many things." And His suffering is set down in two expressions:

1. He must be rejected. Thus He was the "stone which the builders rejected," Psalm 118:22.

2. He must be slain. This diamond must be *cut!* He who gave life to others, must Himself die. And as Christ thus abased 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 is not well laid, all the building will fall*. Let me explain the words:

1. "And He said to them **all**." Self-denial is of universal extent. It concerns all; it respects both ministers and people. Christ spoke it as well to His apostles as to the rest of His hearers.

2. "If any man will come after Me." That is--if he will arrive at that place of glory where I am going--"let him deny himself."

3. "Let him deny himself." Beza and Erasmus render it, "Let him lay aside or reject himself." Self-denial is a kind of self-annihilation. The words have two parts:

First, a *supposal*: "If any man will come after Me."

Second, an *imposal*: "Let him deny himself." These words are not only a permission—but an injunction. It carries in it the force of the command. It is as if a king should say, "Let it be enacted."

The PROPOSITION I shall insist on, is that **a true Christian must be a self-denier.** "Let him deny himself."

**2. Explanation of the Proposition**

**In what sense must a Christian NOT deny himself?**

1. He must not deny his *promise*. A man's promise should be sacred. He is to keep it though it is to his loss, Psalm 15:1,4. He who makes no reckoning of his *promise*—God makes no reckoning of his *profession*.

2. A Christian must not deny his *grace*. He must not disown any good work wrought in him. He ought not to say that he is a dry tree—when the dew of heaven lies upon his branches. As it is a sin for a man to make himself better than he is—so it is to make himself worse. To say he has grace when he has none—is *presumption*. To say he has no grace when he has—is *ingratitude*. It is bearing false witness against the Spirit of God.

**In what sense MUST a Christian deny himself?**

In general, he must deny that carnal part which is as near to him as himself, that which is as the apple of his eye. But more particularly:

**1. A Christian must deny his REASON.** I do not say renounce it—but deny it. Some cry up *the Diana of reason*, making it the rule and standard of faith. Indeed, that there is a God and that this God is to be worshiped, is a law written in the heart of man and is consonant to reason. But *who* God is, and the right mode of worship, is such a sublime matter, that *reason* can no more find out—than the Philistines could Sampson's riddle. Job 11:7, "Can you by searching find out God?"

**Reason must be denied in DOCTRINES proposed to be believed:**

The doctrine of the **Trinity**. The well is deep, and who canfathom it with the *plumbline of reason*! The three persons in the Trinity are *distinguished* but not divided. They are three *subsistences* but one *essence*. The Trinity is purely an object of faith. There are some truths in true religion which are demonstrable by reason, such as that we should flee vice and do to others as we would have them do to us. But the Trinity of persons, in the unity of essence—is of divine revelation, and must be assented to by faith. Those illuminated philosophers who could wisely discourse of the magnitude and influence of the stars, the nature of plants and minerals—could not by their deepest investigation, find out the mystery of the Trinity. This is wholly supernatural and must be adored with humble believing!

The doctrine of the **Incarnation**. This doctrine teaches: that eternity—should be born, that He who rules the stars—should suck the breasts, that a virgin—should conceive, that the branch—should bear the root, that in Christ—there should be two natures, yet but one person, that the divine nature—should not be translated into the human, yet the human nature should be assumed into the person of the Son of God, the human nature is not God—yet one with God. Here frail human *reason* must be denied.

The doctrine of the **Resurrection**. That the body interred, nay, crumbled into a thousand pieces—and the ashes scattered over the earth—should rise again, is above frail human *reason* to imagine. The Epicureans and Stoics derided Paul, when he preached to them of the resurrection, Acts 17:22. Here reason must be taken captive, John 5:28, "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out!" 1 Corinthians 15:42-43. The chemist can, out of several metals mingled together, extract the one from the other, the silver from the gold, the tin from the silver, and can reduce every metal to its own species. Just so, when the bodies of men are mixed with other substances, the wise God can make a sudden extraction and clothe every soul with its own body. Did not the same particular body rise, it would be rather a *creation,* 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 *oppose* reason—but *transcend* it!

**Reason must be denied in in DUTIES enjoined to be practiced.** There are many duties in piety, which carnal reason quarrels at.

God says, "It is the glory of a man to pass by an offense," Proverbs 19:11.

"No!" says carnal reason, "it is cowardice!" The heathens thought it gallantry of spirit, to avenge injuries.

God says that the paths of holiness are strewn with roses. Proverbs 3:17, "Her ways are ways of pleasantness."

"No!" says carnal reason, "they are severe and cynical. I must crucify my delights and drown my mirth in tears!"

God says that piety is gainful. 1 Timothy 6:8, "Godliness is great gain." It brings contentment arising from the favor of God. It brings temporal riches. Proverbs 3:16, "In her left hand riches and honor." The way to be prosperous is to be pious.

"No!" says carnal reason, If I follow the trade of piety I shall go bankrupt!" In this case, carnal reason must be denied and fought against.

He who will go no farther than *erring human reason* will come many leagues short of heaven.

**2. A Christian must deny his WILL.** Brugensis said, "The will is the great wheel in the soul—which moves all the affections." The will in the state of *innocence* was regular. It echoed God's will. But since the fall, though it retains its freedom in moral actions—yet spiritually it is depraved. "If the will could cease from sinning," says Bernard, "there would be no hell." The greatest wound is fallen upon the *will*. The mariners compass, being stricken with thunder, causes the point of the needle to be wrong. Man's nature being corrupted, causes the will to point wrong; it points to evil. There is in the will, not only *impotence* but *obstinacy*. Acts 7:51, "You have always resisted the Holy Spirit."

Here we must deny our will, and subject it to God's will. If a crooked stick is laid upon a level ground—we do not try to bring the ground even with the stick—but to make the stick even to the ground. So God's will is not to be brought to ours—but *our crooked will* must be brought to God's will. We pray, "Your will be done." The way to have our will, is to deny it.

**3. A Christian must deny his own RIGHTEOUSNESS**, his moralities, duties, and good works. Philippians 3:9, "That I may be found in Him not having my own righteousness." The *spider* weaves a web out of her own body. A hypocrite would spin a web of salvation out of his own righteousness. But Paul, like the *bee*, sucked salvation from the flower of Christ's righteousness. Isaiah 64:6, "All our righteousness are as filthy rags." Our best duties are filled with sin. Put gold in the fire— and out comes the dross. Our most golden services are mixed with unbelief. The angel pouring sweet fragrances into the prayers of the saints, Revelation 8:3, shows that they are in themselves unsavory—and need Christ's sweet fragrances to perfume them.

We must never trust in our duties—but only in Christ's righteousness for salvation. Noah's dove made use of her wings to fly—but trusted the ark for safety.

And, if we must deny our *holy things* in point of justification, then much more our civilities and moralities. A stake may be finely painted—but it has no root. A man may be painted with morality—and yet have no root of grace. A moral person is only externally washed—not internally changed. The life may be civil to men—when the heart is wicked against God; just as the sea may be calm—when the water is salty. The Pharisee could say he was no adulterer, Luke 18:11—but he could not say he was not proud.

The moral person may have a secret antipathy against godliness. He may hate grace—as much as vice. Morality is but a cracked title to heaven. A piece of brass may shine—but, lacking the King's image, it will not pass as currency. A man may shine with moral virtues—but lacking the image of God consisting in holiness—he will not pass as currency at the day of judgment. Morality is good—but God will say, "You still lack one thing!" Luke 18:22. Morality is a good *Jacob's staff* to walk with among men—but it is a bad *Jacob's ladder* to climb up to heaven!

**4. A Christian must deny all SELF-CONFIDENCE.** How confident was Pendleton of himself, "This *fat* of mine shall melt in the fire, for Christ!" But instead of that his *courage* melted.

The same Hebrew word signifies both *confidence* and *folly*. Self-confidence betrays folly. Peter presumed too much on his own strength, "Peter replied—Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will." Matthew 26:33. But how soon was his confidence shaken and blown down with a breath of a young girl! Matthew 26:71-72, "He denied it with an oath, saying, I don't know the man!" Peter's denying of Christ, was the result of not denying his self-confidence. Self *jealousy* is good. Romans 11:20, "Be not high-minded—but fear." The *trembling reed* often stands when the *confident cedar* falls. Who that knows the fierceness of a *trial*, or the falseness of his *heart*—will not fear? How have some professors shined like stars in the church's hemisphere, yet have been *falling* stars? Porphyry, Julian, Cardinal Pool, Gardener, Judas. The Apostles have been called by some of the ancients, by such terms as "the eyes of the world," "Christ's feet," "the church's breasts." Judas was one of these—yet a traitor.

Nay, some of the saints, through God's withdrawing the influence of His Spirit, have *relapsed* for a time, such as Cranmer and Origen, whose heart fainted under persecution, and he offered incense to the idol.

Deny self-confidence. 1 Corinthians 10:12, "Let him who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall." It is just with God, that he who *trusts* himself—should be *left* to himself! The vine being weak, twists around the oak to support it. A good Christian, being conscious of his own imbecility, twists by faith around Christ. Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ's strengthening me." Sampson's strength lay in his hair. Ours lies in our head, Christ.

**5. A Christian must deny pride and SELF-CONCEIT.** Job 11:12, "*Vain man* would be wise." In the Hebrew it is *"Empty man!"* Man is a proud piece of flesh! He is apt to have a high opinion of himself. Acts 8:9, "Simon had been a sorcerer there for many years, claiming to be *someone great."* Sapor calls himself *"Brother of the Sun and Moon."* Commodus the Emperor called himself *"The Golden Hercules."* The Persian kings made others worship their images. Such as view themselves in the *flattering looking-glass of self-love,* appear bigger in their own eyes than they are. They think their *spark* is a *sun!* They think their *drop is* a *sea!* They are highly conceited of their acumen, their wit and abilities, and are ready to despise others. The Chinese think so highly of themselves, that they say that Europe has one eye and they have two, and the rest of the world is blind.

Deny self-conceit. Romans 12:3, "I say to every man who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think." Proverbs 23:4, "Cease from your own wisdom." It does not say cease from being wise—but from thinking yourself wise, Proverbs 3:7 and Philippians 2:3.

That you may deny all high, supercilious thoughts of yourselves, consider:

Self-conceit is a great sin. Chrysostom calls it "the mother of hell." It is a kind of idolatry, a self-worshiping.

Whatever noble endowments you have, are *borrowed*. As the man said of the axe which fell in the water, 2 Kings 6:5, "Oh, my master—it was *borrowed!"* And what wise man would be proud of a jewel that was *lent* to him? "What makes you better than anyone else? What do you have that God hasn't given you? And if all you have is from God, why *boast* as though you have accomplished something on your own?" 1 Corinthians 4:7. The moon has no cause to be proud of her light—for which she is indebted to the sun.

Whatever acuteness of wit, or sageness of judgment you have—think how far short you come. How far short do you come of that knowledge which Adam had in innocence? He was the oracle of wisdom. He could unlock nature's dark cabinet and find out those secrets which bewilder us. Adam had a full inspection into the cause of things. He was a kind of earthly angel.

But how far short do you come of him! Your knowledge is checkered with ignorance. There are many hard knots in nature which cannot be easily untied—like why the loadstone should draw *iron* and leave *gold* and *pearl*; or why the Nile should overflow in the summer when waters are usually lowest. Job 38:24-25, "Where is the path to the origin of light? Where is the home of the east wind? Who created a channel for the torrents of rain? Who laid out the path for the lightning?" Why is the sea higher than the earth, and yet does not drown it? How do the *bones* grow in the womb? Ecclesiastes 11:5. Who can explain exactly how the *body* functions? He who sees *clearest*, has a *mist* before his eyes. By eating of the *tree* of knowledge, we lost the *key* of knowledge!

How far short do you come of that knowledge Satan has? He is called "demon" from his knowledge. We read of the "depths of Satan," Revelation 2:24, and his stratagems, 2 Corinthians 2:11. Satan is an intelligent spirit. Though he has lost his *sanctity*—yet not his *knowledge*. Though he has lost his *breastplate*—yet not his *headpiece*. He has wit enough to deceive the *nations*, Revelation 20:3. His understanding is nimble, and, being compared with ours, is like the swift flight of an eagle, compared with the slow motion of a snail. Why, then, should any be puffed up with deceit of their knowledge, wherein the devil far outstrips them!

How far short do you come of the knowledge they have who are perfected in glory? He who is higher than a dwarf—may be lower than a giant. Such as excel others in natural abilities—are of a lower stature than the glorified saints. 1 Corinthians 13:12, "We see through a glass darkly." But the saints in bliss have a full-eyed vision of God. Their light which burned here like a *smothered fire*—is now blown up into a *pure flame*. An glorified young Christian, knows more than the most profound theologians on earth. In heaven, all *shadows* fly away—the sun of righteousness having risen there with his illustrious beams! This may pull down the *plumes of pride* and self-conceit.

Your dark side is broader than your light side. Your ignorance is more than your knowledge. Your *knowledge* is but candle-light; your *ignorance* as the Cimmerian darkness. Job 26:14 "How little a portion is known of God?" The Septuagint renders it, "How little a drop!" To imagine that we can *comprehend the Deity*, is as if we should think that we can *measure the skies*. Christians, the greatest part of your knowledge is not as much, as the least part of your ignorance. This may demolish all proud imaginations. You have no cause to be conceited of the knowledge you *have*—but rather to be humbled for what you *lack!*

Think of what a hell of sin you carry about you. Sin is the accursed thing, Joshua 5:13. It is the quintessence of evil. It is like a stain to beauty. It was typified by the menstrual cloth, which was the most unclean thing under the Law. Though you have knowledge, sin eclipses it. It is as if a woman should have a fair face—but a cancer in her breast! Your knowledge does not so much adorn you, as sin debases you.

Grace can never thrive where pride and self-conceit grow. As a body with cancer cannot thrive—so neither can the soul thrive which is cancered with pride and self-conceit. A proud *head*—makes a barren *heart!*

A supercilious conceitedness is odious, and much lessens any worth in a person. It is like a great flaw in a diamond. The more one values himself, the less God and angels value him. Let a person be eminent—yet, if he is self-conceited, he is loved by none. He is like a physician who has the plague. Though he may be admired for his skill—yet none care to come near him.

Such as have a high opinion of their own excellencies are on the fast track to eternal ruin! Either God infatuates them, Isaiah 29:14, or denies a blessing to their labors, or allows them to fall into some great sin. Peter, who was so well-conceited of himself, as if he had more grace than all the Apostles, the Lord let him fall very low! He denied Christ with an oath, nay, an imprecation, Matthew 26:74. Peter wished a curse on himself if he knew Christ; nay, some think he cursed Christ.

The Lord sometimes lets vain, conceited people fall—not only foully, but finally. "The doves," says Pliny, "take pride in their feathers, and in their flying high at last, they soar so high that they are prey to the hawk!" So, when men fly high in self-conceitedness, they become prey to the prince of the air!

Let all this, make us deny our pride; let it kill the worm of self-conceit. If we are proud of our knowledge—the devil does not care how much we know. Let Paul be our pattern. Though he was the chief of the Apostles, he says, *"I am less than the least of all God's people."* Ephesians 3:8. *"I am nothing."* 2 Corinthians 12:11. This illustrious Apostle, a star of the first magnitude, shrank into nothing in his own eyes. It is excellent to be like Moses, whose face had a luster on it—but "he was not aware that his face was radiant." Exodus 34:29.

**6. A Christian must deny his APPETITE.** The gluttonous appetite cries, "Give, give!" Proverbs 30:15. Paul beat down his body, 1 Corinthians 9:27. Such a proportion only is to be taken for the recruiting of nature, as may help forward God's service. More are hurt by *excess in lawful things*--than by meddling with *sinful* things. More are killed by *wine*--than by *poison*. Many make their belly their god, Philippians 3:19. And to this god, they pour their *drink offerings!* And to this god, they pour their *drink offerings*. Clemens Alexandrinus writes of a fish whose heart is in his belly. This is an emblem of epicures, whose heart is in their belly; they are devoted to their appetite! Excess in food or drink clouds the mind, chokes holy affections, and provokes lust. The *foulest weeds* grow out of the *fattest soil*. Intemperance shortens life—as too much oil extinguishes the lamp. *Many dig their graves, with their teeth!* Christ cautioned His Apostles, Luke 21:34, "Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with *dissipation*." Seneca could say he was born to higher things, than to be a *slave to his body*. What a shame is it—that the soul, that *princely* part, which sways the scepter of reason, and is akin to the angels, should be enslaved to the *brutish* part! Deny the sinful cravings of the flesh. What has God given conscience for, but to be a golden bridle to check the inordinacy of the appetite!

**7. A Christian must deny his EASE.** Proverbs 1:32, "Ease slays the simple." The flesh is prone to sloth and softness. It is loath to take pains for heaven. Proverbs 19:24, "A slothful man hides his hand in his bosom." He is loath to pluck it out—though it is to lay hold on a crown! Weeds and vermin grow in untilled ground, and all vices grow in an idle, untilled heart. How can they expect to reap *a harvest of glory—*who never sowed any seed? Is Satan so busy in his diocese, 1 Peter 5:8, and are Christians idle? Are they like the lilies—which neither toil, nor spin? O deny your ease! Seneca, a heather, devoted himself to labor and spent part of the night in study. Hannibal forced his way over the Alps and craggy rocks. We must force our way to paradise. Let us shake off sloth—as Paul did the viper!

Never think to be brought to heaven as the passengers in a ship are brought to their ports—while *sleeping!* 1 Chronicles 22:16, "Arise and be doing." God puts no difference between the *slothful* servant and the *wicked* servant, "You *wicked* and *lazy* servant!" Matthew 25:26. Those slothful people in Eturia, who like drones enter into the hive and consumed the honey, were expelled from others and condemned to exile. Such as idle away the day of grace and fold their hands to sleep when they should be working out salvation, God will condemn to a perpetual exile in hell.

**8. A Christian must deny CARNAL POLICY.** This is *the wisdom of the flesh*, 2 Corinthians 1:12. Carnal policy is craft. The politician does not consult what is best for the country—but what is the safest policy for himself. The politician is made of willow; he can side with all parties; his religion is cut according to the fashion of the times; he can bow either to the east or to the west. Zeal for *truth,* is blotted out of the politician's creed. Sir Thomas More said that he would not follow truth too near the heels—lest it should dash out his brains. It is judged by some a piece of wise policy, not to declare against error for fear of losing a party.

The *Politician* is a *latitudinarian*. He can go all ways. The ostrich's wings help her to outrun other creatures. Sinful policy makes men run further than they can, who are of purer consciences. In short, the politician is like a chameleon, who can change into all colors—and be of the same mind as his company is. He can be either *serious* or *feathery*. I grant that *Christian prudence* is commendable—but *the serpent* (shrewdness) must not devour *the dove* (inoffensiveness). That policy is unjustifiable, which teaches people to avoid duty. Deny carnal policy; dare to be honest. The best policy is to hold fast to honesty and integrity.

**9. A Christian must deny his inordinate ANGER.** James 1:26, "If any man among you seems to be religious, and bridles not his tongue, this man's religion is vain." Every member of the body is infected with sin, as every branch of wormwood is bitter; but the tongue is *full* of deadly poison, James 3:8. Augustine compares the tongue to a furnace, and too often sparks of anger fly out of it! The Holy Spirit once descended in cloven tongues of fire, Acts 2:3. But the Apostle James speaks of a tongue that is set on fire of hell, James 3:6. Some cannot rule their own spirit—but are carried away with their passions as a chariot with wild horses. "Many," said Jerome, "who will not be drunk with wine—will be drunk with rash anger." Ecclesiastes 7:9, "Anger rests in the bosom of fools!" Anger may *be* in a wise man—but it *rests* in a fool. There is, I know, a holy anger against sin—but the *fury of anger* is the scum which boils off from an unsavory heart! Anger disturbs reason, and makes a person unfit for holy duties.

O Christians, deny yourselves! Pray that God will set a watch before your lips, Psalm 141:4. Labor to quench the fire of wrath—with a flood of tears! It is recorded of Mr. John Bruen, in the county of Chester, that though he was naturally of a hasty, angry spirit—yet at length he got the victory over his passions, and grew so meek and calm that his very nature seemed to be quite altered. Grace does to the passions what Christ did to the sea when it was stormy. He said, "Peace, be still." And there was a great calm. Grace turns the fierceness of the lion—into the meekness of the dove!

**10. A Christian must deny SINFUL FASHIONS.** Romans 12:2, "Be not conformed to this world." That is—do not be conformed to the fashions and mode of it. If the old Christians were to rise out of their graves—our new fashions might frighten them into their graves again! Was there ever such excess in hair? 1 Corinthians 11:14, "Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair it is a disgrace to him." More money is sometimes laid out for a wig to cover one head—than would clothe twenty poor people. One asked Pastor Dod why he did not preach against *those ruffians who wore long hair.* He replied, "If grace comes into their heart—it will make them cut off their hair."

Nor can the female gender be excused for their excess in apparel. "The Lord will strip away their artful beauty—their ornaments, headbands, and crescent necklaces; their earrings, bracelets, and veils of shimmering gauze. Gone will be their scarves, ankle chains, sashes, perfumes, and charms; their rings, jewels, party clothes, gowns, capes, and purses; their mirrors, linen garments, head ornaments, and shawls." Isaiah 3:18-23. Seneca complained of those in his time who hung two or three *houses* on their ears! Some wear half their *incomes* upon their backs! Lysander would not allow his daughters to be too gorgeously attired, saying "it would make them more *common*—than *lovely*." What painted faces and bare shoulders appear in the congregations! That professors should conform and comply with others in their antic dresses, is a reproach of piety! A tear in the eye—would more adorn than a tower on the head. O deny yourselves! Pull down these *flags of vanity*. Have not God's judgments humbled you? 1 Timothy 2:9, "I want women to be modest in their appearance. They should wear decent and appropriate clothing and not draw attention to themselves by the way they fix their hair or by wearing gold or pearls or expensive clothes." Let the hidden man of the heart, be beautified and bespangled with grace. Psalm 45:13, "The king's daughter is all glorious *within*."

**11. A Christian must deny his own AIMS.** He must not look with one eye at piety—and aim at himself with the other eye. He must not aim at self-enriching and self-applause.

He must not aim at **self-enriching**. Some espouse the gospel only for gain. They court this queen, not for her *beauty* but for her *jewels!* It is not the *fire* of the altar they regard—but the *gold* of the altar! 1 Timothy 6:5, "They think that godliness is a means to financial gain." Camero, a French divine of Bordeaux, relates a story of one Santangel, a lawyer, who turned Protestant only out of worldly respects—that he might grow rich.

Judas preached and wrought miracles—but his eye was chiefly on the money bag. How do many ministers heap benefice upon benefice, minding the *fleece* more than the *flock*! ***Dumb dogs*** (that is, those who are afraid to speak the truth for fear that it will offend the rich) ***are greedy dogs***. "For the leaders of my people—the Lord's watchmen, his shepherds—are blind to every danger. They are like *silent watchdogs* that give no warning when danger comes. They love to lie around, sleeping and dreaming. And they are as greedy as dogs, never satisfied. They are stupid shepherds, all following their own path, all of them intent on personal gain." Isaiah 56:10-11. These make use of the ministerial function, only as a net to catch filthy lucre. This is to be profane in sacred things. It is sordid and unworthy of a Christian, to make piety bow to secular interest.

A Christian must not aim at **self-applause**. "Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven." Matthew 6:1. They prayed and gave alms—that they might be seen by men. The *oil of vain-glory* fed their lamp! Verse 5, "Truly they have their reward." They might write "Received in full payment." It is a saying of Spanhemius, that there is in every man by nature*—a measure of Pharisaism*—a seeking after the glory and applause of the world. "Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them *Rabbi*." Matthew 23:5-7

Luther confessed that, although he was never tempted with covetousness—yet he was sometimes with vain-glory! The moth breeds in the finest cloth; and self-seeking is apt to breed in the best duties. Sinister aims corrupt piety. A good aim will not make a bad action good—but *a bad aim* will make a good action bad.

To blame are they who, when they have done any glorious service in the church, take the praise themselves, like those heathens who sacrificed the *wax* to their gods, but kept the *honey* to themselves. Matthew Paris speaks of one who, having in several lectures proved strenuously that Christ was God, and being highly applauded for it, cried out saying, "O Jesus, You are indebted to me for Your divinity this day." Whereupon this doctor was stricken suddenly with a stupidness and forgetfulness.

Let this cause trembling and humility in Christians. Some ships which have escaped the *rocks,* have been wrecked upon the *sands*. Many who have escaped the *rocks of gross scandals* have been wrecked upon the *sands of self-seeking*. Tacitus said he would not have Erasmus's fame and applause, for all the world. No—but to have esteem in God's church is a blessing. Hebrews 11:2 "By faith the elders obtained a good report." Much of the honor of piety depends upon the credit of those who profess it. But the sin is when self-applause is the only thing hunted after. Popular applause is the golden arrow which glitters in the eye—but wounds the heart. How many have been blown to hell with the breath of popular applause.

O let us deny, yes, abhor this vain-glorious temper. We have a holy example in John the Baptist, who sought to lift up Christ and beat down himself. John 1:15, "Someone is coming who is far greater than I am." It is as if he had said "I am but the herald, the voice of one crying. Christ, who comes after me, is the Prince. I am but the morning star; He is the sun. I baptize only with water, He with the Holy Spirit." Thus he sets the crown of honor upon Christ's head.

When Joab had taken Rabbah, he did not usurp the praise to himself—but sent for King David that he might carry away the glory of the victory, 2 Samuel 12:27. So, when any eminent service in church has been done—the glory of all should be given to Christ and free grace! It is better that God should approve—than that the world should applaud! If we are faithful, we shall have honor enough in heaven.

Let this be our chief aim in duty that we may grow more in love with God and be made more like Him, have more communion with Him, and bring more revenues of honor to Him. 1 Peter 4:11, "That in all things, God may be glorified." We should not only *advance* God's glory, but *design* God's glory. It was a worthy speech of Philip de Mornay upon his deathbed, that he had, through the course of his life, made God's glory his end and aim. *As all the rivers run into the sea, so all our actions must run 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." The Turks say in their Koran—that God did not give men lustful desires to be frustrated. The scripture gives no license for sin. It bids us to *deny ungodly lusts*. It is not likely he will sacrifice his *Isaac*—his worldly profits—who will not sacrifice the *ram*—his vile lusts! A Christian must deny his malice, revenge, covetousness, uncleanness, superstition, and heterodoxy. A man may as well go to hell for a drunken opinion—as a drunken life. And let me especially instance two sins a Christian must deny:

**A Christian must deny the sin of rash censuring.** James 4:11, "Don't speak evil against each other." Some make it a part of their religion—to criticize others, and clip their credit to make it weigh lighter. You shall hear them say, "Such a one is proud, factious, and hypocritical." James 4:12, "Who are you to judge another?" Augustine could not endure that any should detract from the good name of others.

The *root* of censoriousness is *pride*. A person thinks that by taking away from another's reputation—he shall add something to his own. But let him who shall raise himself upon the ruin of another's fame, be warned. Do you think it is no sin to murder a man in his name? You who are such a critic, it is to be feared you can spy all faults but your own! O Christian, look inward. If you viewed your own spots more in the looking-glass of the Word, you would not be as ready to throw the *stone of censure* at others. Deny this sin of *rash censuring* and *smiting with the tongue*, Jeremiah 18:18. You who speak reproachfully of your brother without a cause, the time may come that he may be accepted—and you rejected! He may be found gold—and you reprobate silver!

**A Christian must deny his besetting complexion sin.** Psalm 12:23, "I have kept myself from *my* iniquity." As there is one master bee in the hive, so there is naturally one master sin in the heart. This must be denied. The devil can hold a man fast by one sin. A jailer can hold the prisoner fast by one fetter. One sin is enough to stop the current of mercy. One sin may damn as well as more, just as one millstone is enough to sink a man into the sea. If there is any lust which we cannot deny, it will be a bitter root either of scandal or apostasy.

**13. A Christian must deny his RELATIONS.** Luke 14:26, "If any man comes to me and hates not father and mother and wife and children, he cannot be My disciple." The meaning is, when carnal relations come in *competition* with Christ, or stand in *opposition* to Christ—we must hate them. *When our friends would prove snares, and hinder us from our duty, we must either leap over them or tread upon them!* Here is faith in God. "If my wife," said Jerome, "should hang about my neck, and persuade me to deny Christ, I would break from her and fly to the cross!" When *Peter* would be a tempter, Christ said, "Get behind Me, *Satan*."

**14. A Christian must deny his ESTATE for Christ.** A carnal heart will commend and profess Christ—but will part with nothing for Him. The young man in the gospel was Christ's *hearer*—but not His *follower*. "He had heavenly desires—but an earthly appetite," as one has said. When Christ said to him, "Sell all and give to the poor," he went away sorrowful, Matthew 19:22. When riches are joined with a bad heart, they do much hurt. The world lay nearer the young man's heart than Christ.

Have some of the heathens denied the world? Epaminondes, a Grecian captain who obtained many glorious victories, was a great despiser of the world. He refused vast sums of money sent him from the King of Persia, so that when he died he left scarcely enough to defray the charges of his funeral. Did a heathen go thus far in denying the world, and shall not Christians do much more? Let the *wedge of gold* be denied for the *pearl of great price*. Matthew 19:27, "We have forsaken all and followed You." A true saint esteems the *gleanings of Christ* better than the *world's vintage*. Philippians 3:8, "For whom I have suffered the loss of all things."

Galeacius, marquess of Vico, parted with a fair estate to enjoy the pure ordinances of Christ at Geneva. When a Jesuit persuaded him to return to his popish religion in Italy, promising him a huge sum of money, he said, "Let their money perish with them, who esteem all the gold in the world worth one hour's communion 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 voluntary and spontaneous. He who suffers against his will—*bears* the cross; he who suffers willingly—*takes up* the cross. A fair virgin fell in love with Crates for his learning. He showed her his staff and his scrip. "This," he said, "is your i." Christ shows us His *cross*. If we will not have Him upon these terms, the match is not likely to go on. Sufferings are waiting for us, Acts 20:23. "Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." 2 Timothy 3:12. **The devil has not grown kinder.** "Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour!" 1 Peter 5:8.

Some think of *reigning* with Christ—but not of *suffering* with Christ. Joseph dreamed of his *advancement,* but not of his *imprisonment*.

The flesh cries out, That *cross* is painful! There are *nails* in that cross which tear me!"

But life must be *denied*, yes, *hated* for Christ. Luke 14:26, "If any man comes to Me and hates not father and mother and his own life, he cannot be My disciple." Love for Christ must outweigh life. Revelation 12:11, "They loved not their lives to the death." Paul carried the image of Christ in his heart as a saint, and the message of Christ in his body as a martyr, Galatians 6:17. The primitive worthies snatched up torments as so many crowns, and were content to shed their blood for Christ, knowing they would exchange their bloody robes-for white ones. The prophet Isaiah was sawn in half. Jeremiah was killed by stoning. Amos was killed with an iron bar. Luke was hanged on an olive tree.

I read that Irenaeus was carried to a place where a cross was set on one side and an idol on the other. He was given a choice either to bow to the idol—or suffer on the cross. He chose the latter.

Basil speaks of a virgin condemned to the fire. She was offered her life and estate if she would bow down to an image. She answered, "Let life and money go; welcome Christ!"

Though every Christian is not actually a martyr—yet he has a preparation of 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 men be content to suffer for their lusts, and shall we not suffer for Christ? We are to look upon our sufferings as a badge of honor. If we receive honor when we are *reproached* for Christ, much more shall we receive it when we *die* for Him. 1 Peter 4:14, "If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you." Our sufferings for Christ propagate piety. Paul's being imprisoned made the gospel to be more enlarged, Philippians 1:12. Justin Martyr was converted to the faith by beholding the heroic patience and courage of the Christians in their sufferings.

The **cross** leads to the **crown**. 2 Timothy 2:12, "If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him." Who would not be willing to venture on the seas, though rough and tempestuous, if he were sure to be crowned as soon as he came ashore? Persecutors may take away from us our *goods*—but not our *God*. They may take away our *liberty—*but not our freedom of conscience. They may take off our *head*—but not our crown! Revelation 2:10.

He who cannot deny his life for Christ, will deny Christ. And he who 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."

**3. The GROUND of the Proposition**

The grand reason why we must deny ourselves, is because we can be saved no other way. A town or castle may have several ways leading to it. But there is only one way leading to the celestial paradise, and that is self-denial. Without self-denial, we can never come up to Christ's terms. If the world cannot be denied—Christ cannot be trusted. If the will is not denied—Christ cannot be obeyed. Therefore, self-denial is absolute necessity to enter heaven.

**4. An INFERENCE Drawn from the Proposition**

From all that has been said, see how **hard** a thing it is to be a Christian. Were it only to put on the *mantle of profession*, it would be easy. Even Satan can transform himself into an angel of light, 2 Corinthians 11:14. But a man *must* deny himself. This self-emptying or self-annihilation is the strait gate through which a Christian must enter into the kingdom of God. He is not to deny only those things which are *outside* of him—his worldly profits; but those which are *within* him—his sins, nay, his righteousness. **Self is an idol, and it is hard to sacrifice this idol**; but this must be done. Either carnal self must be denied, or we cannot truly follow Christ.

**5. A Check to Epicures and Sensualists**

This justly indicts those who live in a contradiction to the text, who instead of denying themselves—they let loose the reins and give themselves up to all manner of pleasure and licentiousness. Ecclesiastes 7:4, "The heart of fools is in the house of mirth." The prophet calls them fools—who do not *mortify* the flesh—but *gratify* the flesh. "You push away every thought of coming disaster, but your actions only bring the day of judgment closer. How terrible it will be for you who sprawl on ivory beds surrounded with luxury, eating the meat of tender lambs and choice calves. You sing idle songs to the sound of the harp." Amos 6:3-5. **Pleasure enchants men's minds, and transforms them into beasts!**

There is a place in Africa called Tombutium where the inhabitants spend all their time in singing and dancing. And have we not many who consume their hours in plays and brothels? As if God has made them like the leviathan—to play in the sea (Psalm 104:26). How will their countenances be changed when God shall say, "Give an account of your stewardship!" These frolicking sensualists live as if there were no world to come. *They pamper their bodies—but starve their souls!* As if one should feed his *dog*—but starve his *wife!*

Do epicures deny themselves? Indeed, in one sense they do. Enjoying their lusts—*they deny themselves a part in heaven!* In the country of Sardinia there is an herb-like balm, that if a man eats of it, he shall die laughing. Such an herb is 'pleasure'. If one feeds immoderately on it, he will go laughing to hell.

Esau lost the blessing while he was hunting. O! How many, while they are hunting after worldly pleasures, lose eternal blessedness? There is a *'sin cup'* brewing which will spoil the sinner's mirth. Psalm 75:8, "For the Lord holds a cup in his hand; it is full of foaming wine mixed with spices. He pours the wine out in judgment, and all the wicked must drink it, draining it to the dregs." This wine is the wrath of God, and it is mixed; the *never-dying worm* and the *eternal fire* are mixed the cup! The Lord will proportion a sinner's torment to his pleasure. Revelation 18:7, "She has lived in luxury and pleasure, so match it now with torments and sorrows!"

**6. The Lack of Self-Denial Lamented**

In the next place, we may sadly lay to heart the lack of self-denial. O self-denial, where have you gone? We live in a knowing age—yet few know how to deny themselves! **Selfishness is the reigning sin of the world.** This makes the times have a bad aspect. 2 Timothy 3:1-2, "Perilous times shall come—for men shall be lovers of themselves."

SELF may have divers actions brought against it. It is an enemy to the public. James 4:1, "Whence come wars?" Whence is robbery and bribery? Whence is oppression and drunkenness, but from those selfish lusts which men cannot conquer? When Lentulus had declared Tiberius Caesar to be his heir in his will, so brutally selfish was Caesar, that he sent and killed Lentulus that he might have immediate possession of his goods.

Self-denial lodges but in a few hearts. It is a sacred, exotic herb which has grown very scarce. Luke 18:8, "When the Son of Man comes, shall He find faith on the earth?" May it not be said, "Shall He find self-denial on the earth?" Self-denial has gone on a long pilgrimage, and who can tell when it will return?

**7. PERSUASIVES to Self-Denial**

My next work is to persuade Christians to the practice of this momentous duty of self-denial. Man *lost* himself at first by self-exaltation, and he must *recover* himself by self-denial.

**1. Self-denial is just and equal.** How much has Christ denied Himself for us? He eclipsed His glory, Philippians 2:7, "He denied Himself." What a wonderful self-denial was it for Christ to leave His Father's bosom and be *incarnate!* **For Christ to be made flesh, was more than for all the angels to be made worms!** Christ denied His *name* and *reputation*, Hebrews 12:2, "He endured the shame." He denied *worldly grandeurs* and *riches*. 1 Corinthians 8:9, "For our sakes He became poor." A feeding trough was His cradle, the cobwebs His curtains. He denied His *life*, Philippians 2:8, "He became obedient to death." It is but equity—that we should deny ourselves for Christ.

**2. Self-denial is the sign of a sincere Christian.** Hypocrites may have great knowledge and make fair pretenses—but it is only the sincere saint who can deny himself and lay his life at Christ's feet. This was a touchstone of Moses' sincerity. He denied the pleasures of the court—and chose affliction rather than iniquity, Hebrews 11:25.

I have read of a holy man who was once tempted by Satan. Satan said to him, "Why do you take all these pains? What do you do, more than I? Are you no drunkard, no adulterer? Neither am I. Do you watch? I never sleep. Do you fast? I never eat. What do you do, more than I?"

"Why," said the good man, "I tell you, Satan, I give myself to prayer, nay, more, I *deny* myself."

"Nay," said the devil, "you go beyond me, for I *exalt* myself." And so he vanished.

**3. Self-denial is a rational thing.** For if *self* is an enemy—then it is wisdom to discard it. There is a rationality in all God's commands. Why would He have us deny fleshly lusts—but because they wage war against our souls! 1 Peter 2:11. Why would He have us deny pride—but because of its harmful quality! Proverbs 16:18 "Pride goes before destruction." Where pride leads the van, destruction brings up the rear! **God would have us deny nothing for him—but that which will damn us if we keep it!**

**4. There is nothing lost by self-denial.** We shall be abundantly compensated. Matthew 19:29, "Everyone who has given up houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or property, for my sake, will receive a hundred times as much in return and will have eternal life." If we deny our name and reputation for Christ, God will give us inward peace. There is "a hundredfold" in this life, and He will honor us before the angels. How many hundredfolds that amounts to, I am not able to tell. If we deny our estate to keep our conscience, God will give us a kingdom, Luke 12:32. What does he lose, who parts with a *flower*—and gets a *precious jewel!* We may lose all we have for Christ—yet lose nothing by Him.

**8. HELPS to Self-Denial**

For the attaining of self-denial, let these rules be observed:

**1. Be convinced of the incomparable excellency of Christ.** He is the quintessence of goodness. He is compared to a *head of gold—*for riches, Song of Solomon 5:10; to the *Rose of Sharon*—for perfume, Song of Solomon 2:1; to a *bright morning star*—for beauty, Revelation 22:16. Jesus Christ is all that is good and lovely. He is all we can require for satisfaction, or that we can desire for salvation. He is fully commensurate to our needs. He has *eye salve* to anoint us, *white raiment* to cover us, and His *blood* to heal us. We shall never deny ourselves for Christ—until we see glory and a beauty in Him. Christ is all marrow and sweetness. He is better than life, estate, or heaven!

**2. Endeavor after a vital principle of grace.** Grace will do that which flesh and blood cannot do. A man may do that by *skill*—which he cannot do by *strength*. A burden of great weight may be lifted up by pulleys, which cannot be lifted up by strength of arm. Grace will teach one the art of self-denial, which cannot be done by strength of nature. In particular, labor for three graces.

**Humility.** A proud man *admires* himself; therefore he cannot *deny* himself. A humble man lays his mouth in the dust. He has lower thoughts of himself, than others can have of him. He renounces himself. He opens to God as the flower opens to the sun. He will *have*—what God will have for him. He will *be*—what God will have him be. He is like melting wax. God may set whatever stamp and impression He will, upon him. The humble man is the self-denier.

**Love.** Who will not deny himself for a friend whom he loves? He will part with anything he has. He will gratify him who he loves, though it is to his own loss. He whose heart is fired with love for Christ—will stop at nothing for His sake. Gregory Nazianzen said of his Athenian learning, that he was glad he had anything of worth, to esteem as nothing, for Christ. **Love for God will devour self-love.**

**Faith.** Abraham was a great self-denier. He left his kindred and country and was willing to travel to any place where God would have him. Whence was this? It was from his faith. Hebrews 11:8, "By faith Abraham obeyed and went out, not knowing where he went." He who believes that Christ and heaven are his—what will he not relinquish for Christ's sake? The stronger a Christian's faith is, the more eminent will his self-denial be.

**3. Pray much for self-denial.** Prayer sets God to work, Psalm 10:17. Let this be your grand request—a self-denying frame of heart. Self-denial does not grow in nature's soil. It is a fruit of the Spirit. Beg God that He will plant this heavenly flower in your soul. Say, "Lord, whatever You deny me, do not deny me *self-denial.* Let me rather lack great abilities, nay, let me lack the comforts of the Spirit—rather than self-denial."

**There may be going to heaven without comfort—but there is no going there without self-denial.**