

Holiness and Self-Denial

by Samuel Logan Brengle

Self-denial is the voluntary giving up of something we like or want, for the sake of others or for the sake of Jesus, and it is the key to spiritual growth and holiness.

Scripture: Matthew 6:19-21, Matthew 25:40, Luke 9:23, Acts 20:35, Romans 12:1-2, 2 Corinthians 8:9, Galatians 2:20, Philippians 2:4, James 1:27, 1 John 3:17

Topics: "Self-Denial", "Stewardship"

Description

Samuel Logan Brengle emphasizes the significance of self-denial in the Christian life, illustrating that true self-denial comes from voluntarily giving up what we enjoy for the sake of others and God's glory. He critiques the mindset of those who view their wealth and luxuries as personal entitlements rather than as resources to be stewarded for the needy. Brengle argues that self-denial is not merely about deprivation but about aligning our desires with God's purposes, leading to a deeper relationship with Jesus and a commitment to serve others. He shares personal reflections on how love for Christ transforms self-indulgence into a joy of giving, highlighting that true fulfillment comes from self-sacrifice. Ultimately, he calls believers to embrace self-denial as a pathway to holiness and a reflection of Christ's love.

Transcript

One day John Wesley was to dine with a rich man. One of his preachers, who was present, said, 'Oh, sir, what a sumptuous dinner! Things are very different to what they were formerly. There is but little self-denial now among the Methodists.' Wesley pointed to the table and quietly remarked, 'My brother, there is a fine opportunity for self-denial.'

Denial that is not self-imposed is not self-denial. It might have been self-denial on the part of the host to present a less sumptuous table, but there would then have been no self-denial on the part of the guest. Adverse circumstances or selfish people may deprive us of the luxuries and even of the necessities of life. But our deprivation would not be self-denial. We deny ourselves only when we voluntarily give up that which we like, and which we might lawfully keep. And I have no doubt that God often allows us luxuries and abundance, not that we may consume them upon ourselves, but rather that we may deny ourselves joyfully for His dear sake, and the sake of the needy ones about us.

Often when urging upon well-to-do people the importance of denying themselves in dress and furniture and equipage and the luxuries of life, I have had them turn to me and say, 'If God did not mean me to have these things and enjoy them, why did He give me the means to get them?' And, poor things! they thought

they had crushed me with their logic.

But the answer is simple. God meant them to be stewards, but they considered themselves owners. God meant them to have the greater blessedness of giving, for 'it is more blessed to give than to receive' (Acts xx. 35), but they contented themselves with what they considered the blessedness of receiving. God meant them to pass on His bounty to the multitudes of needy ones about them, but they dammed up and diverted the streams of God's mercy and reveled in what they considered God's special favor and license to unlimited self-indulgence, while the multitudes for whom God really intended these blessings perished of want. They show unmistakably by their conduct that they have not the Spirit of Jesus, Who, 'though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich' (2 Cor. viii. 9), and on the Judgment Day they will surely be found wanting, and woeful will be their condemnation.

Why does God give a woman wealth? That she may spend it on feathers and flowers, and silks and satins, and luxurious apartments? Nay, but that she may spend it upon those who are hungry and cold and dying of bitter want.

Why does God give a mother brilliant, manly sons and lovely daughters? That she may enjoy their presence and train them for society and a career before the world? Nay, but that she may train them to be martyrs, slum angels, missionaries to the heathen and to the barefooted, debauched, neglected, devil-ridden children of the saloons and brothels. Oh, as I have looked at my sweet baby boy and girl and realized the almost infinite difference between their training and that of millions of little ones who have the same rights in Jesus Christ that my children have; as I have realized the tender care with which they are unceasingly watched and sheltered and trained for God and righteousness, my heart has poured itself out to God in unutterable longings. Not that they might be great, but that they might be good; not that they might fill the earth with their fame, but that they might utterly sacrifice themselves for those who have never known the love and instruction of a sainted mother and a Christian home.

Why does God give a man power and influence and fame? That he may be great in the eyes of men and lord it over his fellows and clothe himself in purple and fine linen and live luxuriously? Nay; but that he may throw every jot and tittle of his power and influence into the scale for righteousness of conduct and holiness of character and hasten the utter establishment of the Kingdom of God upon earth.

Self-denial almost ceases to be self-denial when practiced from such a high and holy motive. It is the denial of the lower, base, earthly self; and the gratification of the higher and Heavenly self. It is a turning from earth to Heaven; from that which is fleeting and temporal to that which is eternal. It enlightens the mind, ennobles the character, perfects the heart and brings us into fellowship with Jesus. Bless God! Hallelujah!

'If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself; and take up his cross daily, and follow Me' (Luke ix. 23).

I once read an illustration of Chas. Finney's that has had a marked influence on my life. In substance, it was this: 'Suppose a man were traveling in a foreign land, and, being waylaid and captured by brigands, he were sold into slavery, and a great ransom demanded for his release. At last, word reaches his anxious wife, informing her of his sad state, and the only condition upon which he could possibly be restored to her. His bondage is cruel, and is fast wearing his life away, but there is no way of escape except the ransom be paid.

'All the love and affection and pity and sympathy of the wife's heart are aroused to the uttermost. She fears for her loved one's life, she can feel the galling chain, she can see the cruel lash of the slave-driver, she can realize the heart-loneliness and bitter bondage of her darling, and she wishes she could fly to his side and share his burden and his sorrow, and no sacrifice seems too great to gain his liberty. She sells all her property, she lays her case before her friends and neighbors and they assist her, and yet she falls far below the amount of the ransom demanded. She labors and toils early and late, and hastens to earn what money she can to add to what she already has; she denies herself every luxury, and almost begrudges every necessity of life. She thinks of the hard fare of her husband, the coarse, scanty food, the miserable hovel, the hard, filthy bed, the heavy, unremitting labour; and the thought of selfish gratification is painful to her.

At last, a stranger hears her sad story, visits her, and gives her twenty pounds. She does not for an instant think: "Now I shall be able to get me a new dress and bonnet in the latest fashion, or get a nice piece of furniture for my rooms, or furnish my table better than in the past." No, no. She burst into tears. She thanks the giver, and she cries: "Now I shall be able to ransom my love, and soon I shall have him in my arms again."

Now, when the Christian whose heart throbs with love for the Saviour, realizes that Jesus puts Himself in the place of the prisoner in his lonely, dark cell; the slave toiling without recompense under the lash, with the galling, clanking chain; the sick one on the bed of sleeplessness and pain; the heathen, in his blindness and ignorance and superstition and fear; the helpless orphan and the poor widow, and the outcast sinner, and says, 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me' (Matt. xxv. 40), he must deny himself.

When he sees Jesus, lonely and full of toil and sorrow, again, in the person of these suffering ones, he finds it easier to deny himself than to indulge himself; and self-sacrifice becomes a joy, while self-indulgence becomes a grief and a moral impossibility.

It is for this reason that I deny myself. It is for Jesus, and the souls for whom He died. For years I lived for myself. All my hopes and ambitions centered in myself; even my desire to go to Heaven was more a desire to escape from the pains of Hell than to enjoy the society of Jesus and redeemed souls, and to do good and be holy. But at last all this was changed! My sins became a burden. I loathed myself. The righteous indignation and wrath of God against evil-doers took hold upon me, and I feared I should be lost for ever. But I found deliverance through Jesus; through Him I found forgiveness of sins and freedom from the bondage of selfishness. He did not upbraid me, but loved me freely, and won my heart, and filled me with a confidence and love toward Him that were unutterable.

With that love to Him came a love for the whole world of saints and sinners. At first I groped about somewhat blindly to know how to express that love, but true love will always finally express itself in uttermost self-sacrifice for its object, and in so doing adds fuel to its flame. Since then, I have found it easier to give than to withhold. I began by giving one-tenth of my income, but I could not stop there. Any case of need, any appeal for help, wrung my heart with an anguish of desire to give, until if it were not for the foresight of a prudent wife, who gets me to lay up money with her for a needed suit, I should frequently be without suitable clothes to wear.

This is not natural. It is spiritual-supernatural. In the old days when I had plenty of money, I can remember that it was rather grudgingly that I subscribed two dollars a year to the support of the Gospel! I should be

decidedly ashamed to tell this, but for the fact that I am now 'a new creature,' and an honest confession is good for the soul.

How can I indulge myself while others suffer? How can I hoard up wealth and this world's goods while others perish of want? Why can I not trust Him to supply my wants, who feeds the sparrows with unfailing supply? Why did He speak so, if it was not to encourage one to cast abroad with an open, liberal hand and trust Him for daily bread?

I want the 'full strength of trust to prove,' and how can I have such trust if I never once in my life give away all I have, and boldly trust Him to supply my need and confound a taunting devil? I have done it; glory to God! and He has not failed me. Instead of finding my feet on quicksands, I found them on granite, and instead of starvation, I found plenty. Bless God for ever! Oh, there is a divine philosophy in self-denial that the wise folks of this world never dream of!

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