

The Discovery and Death of Self.

by Francois Fenelon

Francois Fenelon's sermon emphasizes the necessity of recognizing and dying to self-love for spiritual growth and transformation.

Scripture: Job 3:25, Romans 6:6, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Galatians 2:20, Philippians 1:21

Topics: "Dying To Self", "Spiritual Transformation"

Description

Francois Fenelon preaches about the discovery and death of self, emphasizing the painful but necessary process of exposing and overcoming self-love in order to fully surrender to God. He describes how God uses seasons of weakness to reveal the hidden self-love within us, pushing it into the light for us to confront and ultimately let go. Fenelon encourages the congregation to embrace this process of dying to self, not seeking quick remedies or comforts, but allowing God to work in them to bring about true transformation and freedom.

Transcript

LETTER X.

The discovery and death of self.

Yes, I joyfully consent that you call me your father! I am so and will be always; there needs only on your part a full and confident persuasion of it, which will come when your heart is enlarged. Self-love now shuts it up. We are in a strait place, indeed, when we are enclosed in self, but when we emerge from that prison, and enter into the immensity of God and the liberty of his children, we are set at large. I am rejoiced to find that God has reduced you to a state of weakness.

Your self-love can neither be convinced nor vanquished by any other means, ever finding secret resources and impenetrable retreats in your courage and ingenuity. It was hidden from your eyes, while it fed upon the subtle poison of an apparent generosity, by which you constantly sacrificed yourself for others. God has forced it to cry aloud, to come forth into open day, and display its excessive jealousy. O how painful, but how useful, are these seasons of weakness? While any self-love remains, we are afraid of its being revealed, but so long as the least symptom of it lurks in the most secret recesses of the heart, God pursues it, and by some infinitely merciful blow, forces it into the light.

The poison then becomes the remedy; self-love, pushed to extremity, discovers itself in all its deformity by a transport of despair, and disgraces all the refinements, and dissipates the flattering illusions of a whole life. God sets before your eyes your idol, self. You behold it, and cannot turn your eyes away; and as you have no longer power over yourself, you cannot keep the sight from others. Thus to exhibit self-love without its mask is the most mortifying punishment that can be inflicted.

We no longer behold it wise, discreet, polite, self-possessed, and courageous in sacrificing itself for others; it is no longer the self-love whose nourishment consisted in the belief that it had need of nothing, and the persuasion that its greatness and generosity deserved a different name. It is the selfishness of a silly child, screaming at the loss of an apple; but it is far more tormenting, for it also weeps from rage that it has wept; it cannot be still, and refuses all comfort, because its venomous character has been detected.

It beholds itself foolish, rude, and impertinent, and is forced to look its own frightful countenance in the face. It says with Job: "For the thing which I greatly feared is come upon me, and that which I was afraid of is come unto me." (Job iii. 25.) For precisely that which it most fears is the most necessary means of its destruction. We have no need that God should attack in us what has neither life nor sensibility. It is the living only that must die, and all the rest is nought.

This, then, is what you needed, to behold a self-love convinced, sensitive, gross, and palpable. And now all you have to do, is to be quietly willing to look at it as it is; the moment you can do this, it will have disappeared. You ask for a remedy, that you may get well. You do not need to be cured, but to be slain; seek not impatiently for a remedy, but let death come. Be careful, however, lest a certain courageous resolve to avail yourself of no remedy, be itself a remedy in disguise, and give aid and comfort to this cursed life.

Seek no consolation for self-love, and do not conceal the disease. Reveal everything in simplicity and holiness, and then suffer yourself to die. But this is not to be accomplished by any exertion of strength. Weakness is become your only possession; all strength is out of place; it only serves to render the agony longer and more distressing. If you expire from exhaustion, you will die so much the quicker and less violently. A dying life must of necessity be painful. Cordials are a cruelty to the sufferer on the wheel; he only longs for the fatal blow, not food, nor sustenance.

If it were possible to weaken him and hasten his death, we should abridge his sufferings; but we can do nothing; the hand alone that tied him to his torture can deliver him from the remains of suffering life. Ask, then, neither remedies, sustenance, nor death; to ask death, is impatience; to ask food or remedies, is to prolong our agony. What, then, shall we do? Let alone; seek nothing, hold to nothing; confess everything, not as a means of consolation, but through humility and desire to yield.

Look to me, not as a source of life, but as a means of death. As an instrument of life would belie its purpose, if it did not minister to life, so an instrument of death would be falsely named, if, in lieu of slaying, it kept alive. Let me, then, be, or at least seem to you to be, hard, unfeeling, indifferent, pitiless, wearied, annoyed, and contemptuous. God knows how far it is from the truth; but he permits it all to appear; and I shall be much more serviceable to you in this false and imaginary character than by my affection and real assistance, for the point is not, how you are to be sustained and kept alive, but how you are to lose all and die.

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