

The Importance of Self Knowledge

by Thomas Reade

The sermon emphasizes the importance of self-knowledge, the dangers of self-deception, and the power of faith in Christ for salvation.

Scripture: Matthew 7:13, Matthew 7:21, John 3:3, Romans 2:6, 1 Corinthians 3:18, 2 Corinthians 13:5, Galatians 6:3, James 1:22, Revelation 22:17

Topics: "Self Deception", "Spiritual Regeneration"

Description

Thomas Reade preaches about the importance of self-knowledge, highlighting the deceitful nature of the human heart and the need for humility, self-denial, and faith in Christ. He emphasizes the danger of self-deception, especially in matters concerning salvation, and the contrast between spiritually-minded and carnally-minded individuals. Reade urges believers to examine themselves, guard against false doctrines, and seek true regeneration through faith in Jesus Christ.

Transcript

63. THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-KNOWLEDGE

"Let no man deceive himself." 1 Cor. 3:18

What a compound of contrarities is this heart of mine! Heavenly Father! how wonderful is your forbearance; how amazing your patience! I pray unto you for humility. You graciously hear my request; and put me into a situation where my pride is mortified and wounded. Do I then rejoice at perceiving such an answer to my prayer? Alas! no. How are my feelings hurt; how do fretful complainings fill my breast. Lord have mercy on so weak, so wretched a creature, and make me more sensible of the mercies I pray for, and more resigned to your will.

I pray for the grace of self-denial. In answer to my supplication you give me an opportunity of exercising this grace. Do I bless you for this token of your love? Do I cheerfully embrace this opportunity for self-denial? Ah! no. My heart makes a thousand excuses for a little longer self-indulgence, saying, as Lot did with respect to Zoar, "Is it not a little one?" Oh! how numberless are the arts of self-deception. How slowly do we attain to the knowledge of ourselves! Lord increase my faith. Subdue my corruptions. Conquer my stubborn will. Cast me into the mold of the gospel, and make me wholly yours.

The danger of self-deception increases in proportion to the magnitude of the thing about which we are deceived. The salvation of the soul is the chief concern of man; to be deceived on this point, is eternally fatal. The Scriptures divide all mankind into two great classes, the spiritually and the carnally minded. The one walk by faith, the other by sight; the one, are the children of God; the other, the children of the devil. The former have their affections set on things above; the latter delight in everything earthly and sensual; their views are bounded by time; their interests are founded on the 'shadow of a moment'. Strange as it may appear, yet, upon this airy nothing, the men of the world build their hopes, which vanish like the midnight dream.

Our Savior has described by parable, the character and end of the rich worldling. When the man was promising to himself years of ease and pleasure, the sentence went forth to cut the cumberer down. "You fool! this night your soul shall be required of you."

A reflecting mind, impressed with the value of eternal things, mourns over this infatuation. What man would dare to sleep on the brink of a loose and crumbling precipice; or to stand on the summit of a mast, during the heaving of the vessel in a storm? And yet, thus rash is the man who trusts in his riches, and prides himself on worldly greatness. He leans on a vapor; he grasps a shadow; he sinks into destruction!

No character is more common than the carnally-minded. It is the character of all the unregenerated part of mankind, whether among Jews, and Heathens, or the baptized members of the visible Church. Actions speak more forcibly than words. They are the test of character. Like fruit upon the tree, they show the nature of the man, while motives, like the sap, are hidden from our view.

Faith, producing love and obedience, characterizes the trees of righteousness of the Lord's planting; but are these graces of the Spirit to be found in the hearts of the worldly? Do we not there behold, as evidenced by the life; sensuality and enmity to God? Such people, if rich, are honored; if generous, are applauded; if possessed of power, are courted and flattered. But what said our Lord; "Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you!" "That which is highly esteemed among men, is abomination in the sight of God."

The world is full of such people, and the visible Church has been contaminated in every age, by men who love filthy lucre, the lust of power, or the lust of the flesh. Paul mourned over a Demas, who loved this present world. John over a Diotrephes, who loved to have the pre-eminence. And the early Fathers of the Christian Church, over those who stained by impurity the so-called angelic state of celibacy. The Church of Rome is proverbial for these evils. Oh! that our Reformed Churches may ever shine in the beauty of holiness, and by a weanedness from the world. But alas! the world has crept into the Church. Hence arises the drooping state of our once flourishing vine. Lord look down from heaven, behold and visit this Vine. Water it with the dew of grace. "Revive your work in the midst of the years."

The history of the gospel is chiefly the history of Christ's conquest over the spirit of the world. And the number of true Christians, is only the number of those who, following the Spirit of Christ, have lived contrary to the spirit of the world. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." "Whoever is born of God overcomes the world." This is the language of the whole New Testament. This is the mark of Christianity, "You are dead, and your life is hidden with Christ in God."

O! my soul, as standing on the borders of eternity, weigh well these things. Seek after heavenly wisdom, to know yourself. Dread self-deception. Prepare to meet your God.

There are a thousand ways whereby we may deceive ourselves. Vices, through the artifice of Satan, are decked with rose-buds, and concealed under specious titles. He puts a fascinating mask upon the face of sin, and thus, like the angler, hides the hook. The wretched sinner, like the silly fish, sees not the snare. Like the maniac, he imagines himself a king, while held in fetters, though his scepter is but a straw! Are not such people objects of pity? Should they not be subjects for prayer?

Oh! my soul, feel the pulse of your affections. Do they beat for Christ? Is he your Portion, your Eternal All? If so, then the Spirit of Christ and of glory rests upon you. God numbers you among his beloved people, his chosen ones, his jewels. But if you are a stranger to the covenant of grace; if you are unacquainted with Christ as the hope of glory; if you have never felt the plague of inward corruption; if you have never come to Christ as a poor heavy laden sinner, nor taken his yoke upon you; if, in short, you are not renewed in the spirit of your mind, striving against sin, crucifying the flesh, renouncing the world, and perfecting holiness in the fear of God; then are you, however honored, applauded, or courted by the world, an enemy of God, a child of wrath, an heir of hell!

Oh! eternal Spirit of all grace and truth, display your saving power in my salvation. Convince me of sin. Reveal me to the mighty Savior. Lead me to the garden of Gethsemane, to the hill of Calvary, that there I may behold the bloody sweat, and hear the dying groans, of my crucified Redeemer. There, in the sacred mount, melt my heart to penitence and love, and make me wholly, and entirely yours.

A self-righteous spirit is a spirit of self-delusion, "By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." This is a standing truth of the gospel, which age; cannot alter, though ages past and present have wrought hard to pluck it from the word of life.

Who, then, can be saved? The gospel tells us "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." Faith in Christ opens the storehouse of heaven. Faith lays hold on Him who is the Possessor of all things. This is the mighty instrument which baffles all the arts of Satan, and the malice of the world. It shows the sinner to himself, and leads him to his Savior.

When Paul, by faith, beheld the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and himself, as the chief of sinners; when he beheld by faith, the preciousness of Christ, and the fullness, the fitness, and the freeness of his great salvation; he was overwhelmed with the view. Then he renounced his boasted virtues, his legal righteousness, and desired only, that he might win Christ, and be found in him. Then he gloried in nothing save in Christ crucified. Then his wish was, to die, and to be with Christ. He hastened to the cross, and there, through faith, he washed away his sins. He seized, by faith, the robe of righteousness which his Savior wrought, and wrapped it round his naked soul. He sought for grace to sanctify him, body, soul, and spirit; to prepare him for sufferings in his Master's service, to preserve him unto eternal glory. He sought and found the blessing. Or, rather, Jesus, in Sovereign Love, sought him out, when hastening on his bloody errand to Damascus, and made him a vessel of mercy, a monument of grace, "a pattern to those who would hereafter believe on him to life everlasting."

Was Saul, the persecuting murderer, converted into a patient lamb? Then, O sinner, fear not, Jesus ever lives. His grace can also save you. How wonderful is the operation of grace. The churches of Judea, heard the wonderful story; "He who persecuted us in times past, now preaches the faith which once he destroyed. And," adds the Apostle, "they glorified God in me." God ever gives his witness to the faithful preaching of the gospel, by making it the instrument of turning many to righteousness; and Satan gives his witness to it, by opposing it with all his might. This arch-enemy well knows the force and efficacy of

preaching the doctrine of the atonement; of a free justification by faith, without the deeds of the law; of the work of the Holy Spirit on the heart; and against such preaching, he plants his artillery. He enlists, not only the worldly and profane, the infidel and the skeptic into his service, but also the formalist and the moral; yes, even some in the ministerial office, who, blinded by prejudice, think that they ought, like Saul of Tarsus, to do many things contrary to such preaching as this.

Do not facts attest this painful statement? We never find a 'moral preacher' derided by the world; neither do we see a moral preacher bringing souls to Christ. He may, by dint of eloquence, arrest the profligate in his course, and lead him to a momentary reflection; but all his powers of rhetoric cannot change his heart. This conquest is reserved for the faithful preaching of the Cross. Christ crucified is the blessed magnet, which draws perishing souls to happiness and heaven. The gospel is "the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believes," though esteemed foolishness by the worldly-wise. Blessed are they, who hold forth, by their doctrine, and in their lives, the gospel of the grace of God. They may be called to endure the wrath of Satan, and the hatred of the world; the reproach of the formalist, and the anathemas of ecclesiastical rulers; but they shall have the smiles of Christ here, and their portion in his kingdom, though burned at the stake, as heretics unfit to live.

Blessed be God! against this true Church, the gates of hell shall not prevail. The waves of trouble may dash against it, but it cannot be overthrown, because it is founded upon the Rock, Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God. The work of redemption is the work of omnipotence. The word of God is mighty in operation. It is as a fire to consume the chaff of error in doctrine, and the dross of sin in practice. It is as a hammer to break in pieces the adamant heart of the rebellious sinner. It is the wisdom of God, and the power of God.

O! my soul, have you experienced this transforming grace, through a believing reception of Christ crucified? "Examine yourself whether you be in the faith; prove your own self." Rest not in forms and ceremonies, however excellent. "Cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils." Let all your hope and confidence be in God.

True religion, such as God will approve, is not confined to particular times and places, but, if truly received into the heart, will show its influence in every place, in every part of the conduct. It is like the sap of a living tree, which extends to the most distant boughs, and circulates through the smallest fibers. Not only actions, but words; not only words, but thoughts; yes, motives, affections, and desires, are guided by the law of truth, and influenced by the law of love.

True religion consists in the right dispositions of a heart, sanctified by the Spirit of Christ; a heart, where self is humbled, where Jesus reigns, where holiness is promoted. When the renewed soul is enabled, through the power of the Spirit, not only to discern the exceeding sinfulness of sin, but also to forsake it; when it is strengthened by faith to overcome the world, and to trust in the righteousness of Christ alone for salvation; not pleading its own good works, (those never failing fruits of faith), but the riches of redeeming love; when the renewed soul is brought, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to put on the Lord Jesus Christ, in his temper, mind, and spirit, being clothed with humility, beautified by meekness, and adorned with charity; when thus renewed and born again, living upon Christ by faith, and being spiritually united to him, as the member to the head, the soul can cast itself in deep contrition at the foot of the cross, bewailing the imperfections of its holiest services, and imploring pardon and acceptance through the atoning sacrifice and all-perfect righteousness of the Redeemer; then is that soul truly a member of Christ, a child of God, and shall soon be made the happy inheritor of the kingdom of heaven.

Is this the prevailing character of baptized Christians? Does the visible Church thus shine in the beauty of holiness? Are all her members temples of the Holy Spirit? Would it not be so, if all were spiritually born again in baptism, since Paul has declared that "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance?" Oh! it is well to have the mind scripturally enlightened, at a time when many would substitute the doctrines of men for the truth of God.

Some people are apt to confound the sign with the thing signified, and thus to make the ordinance of baptism and spiritual regeneration to be one and the same operation; that is, that every child sprinkled with water is invariably born again of the Spirit.

"The agency of the Holy Spirit, when he testifies of Christ and glorifies him, is quite distinct from the means which conveys the testimony. This important distinction is carefully noted in Scripture. In confirmation of this truth, it is written, that the Lord opened the heart of Lydia to attend unto the things which were spoken by Paul. In this instance we plainly see the man of God preaching Christ, and all that is needful for the conversion of the soul on one hand; on the other, the God of all grace exercising his powerful influence, by which the Apostle's preaching obtained success." (Venn)

Preaching the Gospel is a divinely-appointed means of grace; so also are the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper; but, as in the former, the agency of the Holy Spirit is quite distinct from the means; so it is with respect to the two latter. Many heard Paul preach with as much power as Lydia did; but they remained unconverted, and why? because of the hardness of their hearts! Many receive the sacrament of the Lord's Supper without benefit, being destitute of true faith. And multitudes are baptized in the name of Christ, who never manifest their love to him, being still in the bonds of iniquity; for the agency of the Holy Spirit can alone render the means effectual, and not any power or virtue vested in the priest, or in the sacramental rite, apart from, the Sovereign grace of God.

The Holy Spirit's influence must, then, ever be earnestly implored, through faith in the name of Christ, whenever we hear the gospel preached, and whenever the sacraments are administered. We must cease from man. "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom you believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase."

How different is the language and the doctrine of the Apostles, from their boasted successors in the Church of Rome. Oh! that our Reformed Churches may ever be preserved from Papal errors; and, like the primitive Church of Jerusalem, "continue steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." Then will a divine blessing rest upon the labors of faithful ministers, "and many people will be added unto the Lord." Ordinances will then become as wells of salvation, out of which we shall draw, by faith, the living water, through the blessed influence of the Holy Spirit.

"Simon Magus was baptized, and yet remained in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity, as much after his baptism as he was before. And so it may be with us. And this is an infallible proof, that the change which the Scriptures call the new birth, does not always and of necessity accompany this sacred ordinance. As the circumcision of the heart did not always accompany the circumcision of the flesh, so neither does the renovation of the soul always accompany the outward rite of baptism, which shadows it forth; and if only our opponents will distinguish the sign from the thing signified, and assign to each its proper place and office, there will be an immediate end of this controversy." (Simeon)

Oh! my soul, pray earnestly to be guided into all truth. Guard against the influence of those, who would draw you from the simplicity of the gospel. It is most important, not only to know, but to be established, in

the truth as it is in Jesus.

In the transactions of life, one false step is often attended with temporal losses; but in religion, false doctrine, producing wrong conduct as its natural fruit, endangers the salvation of the soul. Errors in doctrine are always dangerous, and never more so, than when they are disguised and clothed with the name of truth. Let me, then, never trifle with a subject which involves my present comfort and future felicity.

Am I born again? What question can be more important. Am I a child of God, or am I not? There are some who will say, "You are." If I ask, When was I made one of God's children? They will reply, "When you were baptized." Must I, then, rest satisfied with this answer? Must I conclude that I am adopted into the family of God, through the baptism of water, without any internal evidence of the baptism of the Spirit? Must I take to myself the precious promises of the new covenant, if destitute of a new heart? Must I call heaven my home, if my affections are glued to this world? Surely I ought to look further into this weighty subject, lest, like the foolish virgins, when the cry is made, "Behold, the bridegroom comes; go out to meet him," I should only have the lamp of an outward profession, while destitute of the oil of an inward and spiritual grace.

John the Baptist, when showing the superior nature of the Baptism of Christ, said "He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit, and with fire;" adds, "His fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." How strikingly is the mixed character of the visible Church described by this simile. He who runs may read, except his eyes be blinded through unbelief, and prejudice, and error.

What can be more awakening, than the declaration which Jesus made to circumcised Jews, and therefore equally applicable to baptized Christians, when he was commending the faith of the Roman Centurion; "Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven; but the children of the kingdom, (awful thought,) shall be cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Surely this should make every Christian to tremble, yes, all who rest their hopes of heaven upon their Church membership, and their baptismal regeneration, if they are unrenewed in the spirit of their mind. "The children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness." Searching words indeed!

The Church, it is true, received me when an infant, into her maternal bosom, by the outward rite of baptism. I was then signed with the sign of the cross, as a badge of my profession, that I might become, through grace, a faithful soldier of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit was supplicated for me, and, in the language of hope and charity, I was admitted to the privileges of the gospel covenant, as a regenerated member of the universal Church. But, though thus received, much remained to be done. When come to years of discretion, I was taught by the Church, that all who truly receive the inward and spiritual grace of baptism, must die unto sin, and live unto righteousness; must repent and believe the gospel; that I am bound to perform, in my own person, the promises and vows then made for me by my sureties, and that if such performance be left undone, I am, by a natural inference, unregenerated, and have no saving interest in the blessings of the baptismal covenant.

That my mind might be deeply impressed with this truth, the Church puts this question to my conscience; "Do you not think, that you are BOUND to believe, and to do, as they have promised for you?"

In the same spirit of hope and charity, the Church teaches me to say, "Yes, verily, and by God's help so I will. And I heartily thank our heavenly Father, that he has called me to this state of salvation through Jesus Christ our Savior. And I pray unto God to give me his grace, that I may continue in the same unto my life's end."

Truly this is the language of a regenerate heart; language which only such a heart can sincerely utter in the presence of a heart-searching God. All who can say from the heart, in sincerity and truth, not trusting to their own strength, but to the grace of God, that they will renounce the devil and all his works; the pomps and vanity of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh; that they will believe all the articles of the Christian faith, and keep God's holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of their life; and whose lives are agreeable to their profession, are truly the members of Christ, the children of God, and the inheritors of the kingdom of heaven.

But, I would ask, is this the heartfelt language, is this the sincere determination, of every baptized child? Experience, alas! says no, for a tree is known by its fruits. If, while repeating these solemn vows and promises made for them at their baptism, and ratified by themselves at confirmation, the works of the devil are practiced; the pomps and vanity of the world idolized; the sinful lusts of the flesh indulged; the truths of the gospel, practically disbelieved; and the will and commandments of God, habitually transgressed; can such people be considered as regenerated, in the saving sense of the term? Though sprinkled with water, and baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and thus admitted as members of the visible Church, can they, while thus enslaved by sin, be the very members incorporate in the mystical body of Christ, which is the blessed company of all faithful people; and be also heirs, through hope, of his everlasting kingdom?

Surely a broad distinction must be made between real and nominal Christians, if we would avoid a strong delusion. If the blind lead the blind, it is no marvel, if both fall into the ditch. Oh! let us understand what regeneration really is, and the self-righteous will shrink from claiming it in baptism; and the spiritually-minded will regard baptism as a real help to holiness, humility, and love. From all this, it is evident, that throughout her beautiful liturgical services, from the baptismal font, to the burial of the dead, the Church of England provides for the strengthening and refreshing of real believers, not for the formal services of her worldly members. She could not furnish two liturgies- one for the sincere, and the other for the hypocrite. If any of her members draw near to God with their mouths, while their hearts are far from him, they, and not the Church, will be answerable for such hypocrisy.

Though baptized when infants, and thus brought into a covenant relation with God, we are bound, when arrived at riper years, to repent and believe the gospel. If we live and die impenitent and unbelieving, we shall never be admitted into the temple above. Great, indeed, is the delusion of those who place their hopes of heaven on the performance of outward forms, while destitute of the Spirit of Christ. And great is the responsibility of those ministers who, to such people cry, "peace, peace, when there is no peace."

"Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leads unto life; and few there be that find it;" are the words of Him to whom all hearts are open, and from whom no secrets are hidden. Surely this declaration should awaken all our solicitude, when it is added, "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leads to destruction, and many there are who go in there."

Am I now walking with the many, or the few? How important is self-knowledge. How dangerous is self-deception! Oh! that I may have grace to detect the deceits of Satan, the corruptions of my heart, the

temptations of the world. The door of mercy is still open. The God of all grace is waiting to be gracious. Jesus is pointing to his hands, his feet, his side. The Spirit bids me fly from the wrath to come; to hasten to the Ark of the everlasting Covenant. Oh! my soul, why linger, like Lot in Sodom? "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come." The Savior says, "Come, for all things are now ready;" the feast is provided; "and yet there is room." God the Father, Son, and Spirit, the Eternal Jehovah, invites you to happiness and glory; he calls you to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, where saints and angels are the guests; yes, where He Himself will be your everlasting Portion.

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