

# The Duty of Self-Denial

by Thomas Watson

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*A Christian must deny their own righteousness, self-confidence, sinful cravings, ease, sinful fashions, and seeking fame in order to seek God and His will.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 75:8, Matthew 6:1, Matthew 26:33, Luke 9:23, Luke 12:19, Romans 12:2, 1 Corinthians 4:7, 1 Corinthians 9:27, Philippians 3:9, 2 Timothy 2:12

**Topics:** "Self Denial", "Christian Sanctification"

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## Description

Thomas Watson preaches on the duty of self-denial, emphasizing the need for Christians to deny their own righteousness and trust only in Christ's righteousness for salvation. He warns against self-confidence, high thoughts of oneself, sinful fashions, indulging in excessive appetites, seeking ease, and aiming for fame or self-applause. Watson also stresses the importance of taking up one's cross daily, being willing to endure suffering for Christ, and not giving in to worldly pleasures that lead to eternal ruin.

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## Transcript

The Duty of Self-Denial

Thomas Watson, 1675

CHOICE EXCERPTS

A bad Jacob's ladder to climb up to heaven!

A Christian must deny his own righteousness--his moralities, duties, and good works. 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. "That I may be found in Him--not having my own righteousness." Philippians 3:9

Put gold in the fire--and out comes the dross. Our most

golden services are mixed with sin. "Our righteousness are as filthy rags." Isaiah 64:6

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 maybe 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--but he could not say he was not proud. Luke 18:11

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!

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Blown down with a breath of a young girl!

"Peter replied--Even if all fall away on account of You, I never will." Matthew 26:33

But how soon was his self-confidence shaken and blown down with a breath of a young girl! "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. Deny self-confidence. 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 godly man, being conscious of his own imbecility--twists by faith around Christ. Sampson's strength lay in his hair. Ours lies in our head, Christ. "I can do all things through Christ's strengthening me." Philippians 4:13

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High, supercilious thoughts of yourselves

"Vain man would be wise." Job 11:12

In the Hebrew it is "Empty man!" Man is a proud piece of flesh! He is apt to have a high opinion of himself.

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!

That you may deny all high, supercilious thoughts of yourselves, consider that self-conceit is a great sin. Chrysostom calls it "the mother of hell." It is a kind of idolatry, a self-worshipping. This should pull down the plumes of pride and self-conceit!

"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

Consider that, whatever noble endowments you have, are borrowed. What wise man would be proud of a jewel which was lent to him? The moon has no cause to be proud of her borrowed light.

Consider what a hell of sin you carry about you! Sin is the accursed thing, Joshua 5:13. It is the quintessence of evil. It was typified by the menstrual cloth, which was the most unclean thing under the Law. This may demolish all proud imaginations.

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 to God. The more one values himself--the less God values him. Such as have a high opinion of their own excellencies, are on the fast track to eternal ruin! 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. But they soar so high, that they are prey to the hawk!" Just so, when men fly high in pride, they become prey to the prince of the air!

All this should make us kill the worm of self-conceit!

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 Corin. 12:11.

This illustrious Apostle, a star of the first magnitude, shrank into nothing in his own eyes!

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Many dig their graves, with their teeth!

A Christian must deny his appetite.

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!

One 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,  
provokes lust, and  
shortens life!

Many dig their graves, with their teeth!

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, should be enslaved to the brutish part! What has God given conscience for--but to be a golden bridle to check the inordinacy of the appetite! Deny the sinful cravings

of the flesh!

"I beat my body and make it my slave." 1 Cor. 9:27

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Take life easy!

"Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry!" Luke 12:19

A Christian must deny his ease. "Ease slays the simple."

The flesh is prone to sloth and softness. It is loath to take pains for heaven. 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!

We must force our way to paradise.

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.

Let us shake off sloth--as Paul did the viper!

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Pull down these flags of vanity!

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 often 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 women 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! 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. "The king's daughter is all glorious within." Psalm 45:13

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Blown to hell with the breath of popular applause!  
A Christian must never aim at fame, or self-applause.  
He must not look with one eye at piety--and aim at himself with the other eye.

"Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them." Matthew 6:1. They prayed and gave alms--that they might be seen by men. The oil of vain-glory fed their lamp!

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.

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.

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!

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There are nails in that cross!

Some think of reigning with Christ--but not of suffering with Christ. The cross leads to the crown! "If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him." 2 Timothy 2:12

"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me." Luke 9:23

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."

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

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

Can wicked men be content to suffer for their  
lusts--and shall we not suffer for Christ?

The prophet Isaiah 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!"

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He will go laughing to hell

"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself  
and take up his cross daily and follow Me." Luke 9:23

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. 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. 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!"

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