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# SELF DENIAL

Edward Reynolds



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# **Self-Denial**

SELF-DENIAL: Explored and Applied IN A SERMON BEFORE The  
Honourable Assembly OF DIVINES: On a Day of their personal  
REFLECTION.

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**To the Honourable Assembly of Divines.**

## **Brethren and Fathers,**

This sermon was delivered at your behest, and before your audience alone. It would have remained within those walls, were it not for the insistence of many esteemed colleagues among you, who urged its publication. The theme of the sermon instructed me to put aside my own judgement regarding the appropriateness or timing of this action, seeing that the views of so many pious and knowledgeable brethren align with it. The publication grants me the benefit of expressing some small token of gratitude for the numerous considered, wise, and informed debates, the various inspiring and heavenly exercises, and the delightful camaraderie, all of which I've been privileged to participate in by sitting among you. These experiences have truly brightened my life, despite significant losses and growing frailties, more so than I would willingly admit in such difficult and turbulent times. It would bring even more joy if you were to kindly accept this humble part of my endeavours, first preached in your presence and now offered for your perusal. This comes from one who sincerely prays that the Lord, whom you belong to and serve, would bless all your efforts for the benefit of his Church and make you effective agents in mending divisions, reconciling disagreements, averting chaos, and promoting peace in his Zion.

Your most humble servant in the Lord, E.R.

## **Self Denial**

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone wants to follow me, they must deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow me."  
- MATTHEW 16:24.

We can observe about CHRIST that often when he showed signs of human frailty, to prevent his followers from being disturbed or stumbling, he simultaneously displayed some significant evidence of his divine power. He was born weak and poor like other infants, yet accompanied by a multitude of magnificent angels announcing his birth to shepherds and a unique star guiding wise men to worship him. He experienced hunger and was tempted by Satan as other men are; however, with his divine power, he overcame the adversary and was attended to by angels. He didn't find fruit on the fig tree he approached, exposing a human lack of knowledge; but at the same time, he demonstrated his divine power by withering the tree from its roots. He was crucified (as the Apostle tells us) in weakness, but even then, he revealed himself as the Lord of Glory by splitting rocks, opening graves, darkening the sun, converting the thief and the centurion, and thus triumphing over principalities and powers.

On the other hand, we see that when holy men in Scripture were notably honoured by God, God arranged for some humbling occurrence to take place, so they wouldn't think too highly of themselves. This happened with David: after his kingdom was established and he had won significant victories over his enemies, a great sin followed, which humbled and troubled him for the rest of his life. Similarly with Hezekiah, after a great deliverance from a powerful enemy and a death sentence, he fell into a sin of pride and vanity. Consequently, the Lord revealed to him his intention to lead his people and children into captivity and hand his treasures over to the King of Babylon, which prompted him to humble himself for his heart's pride. The same happened to Paul, who was taken to the third

heavens, hearing ineffable words and seeing visions of the Lord; but then, a thorn was given to him in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment him, so he wouldn't be overly exalted due to the abundance of revelations. It was also so with Peter in this chapter. He made a magnificent confession of Christ the Messiah, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," and Christ greatly honoured him for it. "And I also say to you," said Christ, "you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my Church." Though this is primarily understood to refer to the rock that Peter confessed, as the learned interpret it, there was something of special honour bestowed upon Peter. Scripture mentions a twofold foundation of the Church: a personal foundation, which is only one - "for no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:11); and a doctrinal foundation, as the Church is said to be built on the foundation of the prophets and apostles (Eph. 2:20), and so we read about twelve foundations in the new Jerusalem (Rev. 21:14). Among these, as Peter was first in faith, being the first to confess Christ as the Messiah, so he was honoured to be the first of these twelve foundations, who would first plant the Gospel and gather a Church for Christ after his Resurrection, as we see he did (Acts 2). Perhaps this is why the Gospel of Circumcision is said to have been entrusted to Peter (Gal. 2:7-8), because the Gospel was first to be preached to the Jews, God's first-born, as per Christ's instruction (Acts 3:26, 13:46, Exod 4:22).

From the moment of Peter's confession, Christ, to dispel all misunderstandings regarding his Kingdom, started to inform his disciples about his forthcoming sufferings. This news immediately upset Peter, who took it upon himself to caution his Master, and rebuke him, saying, "God forbid, this will not happen to you." In response, Christ reproached him sharply: now it's not, "You are Peter," but "You are Satan," a tempter, an adversary to Christ's work

of mediation; (as the word implies elsewhere, Num. 22:22, 2 Sam. 19:22), now not a stone for building, but a stumbling block; "You are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." In other words, you have a worldly and flawed understanding of me and my Kingdom, conceiving of it according to the common perceptions and expectations of men, not in line with God's plan and will.

In this rebuke, we see 1. A personal correction, verse 22. 2. Doctrinal instruction; teaching his disciples and the people that anyone who would (like Peter did) acknowledge him as the Messiah and King of the Church should not anticipate grandeur in this world under him, but must be prepared to follow in the path that he would carve out for them, i.e., to deny themselves as he did (Matthew 26:42), and to carry a cross, as he also did (John 19:17), and thus to follow him. And to alleviate any objections and shock, he assures them that no matter how fearful and suspicious they might be of such a hard service, self-denial is the only way to save themselves (verse 25, 26), and bearing a cross is the only route to a crown and glorious reward (verse 27). To prevent this from seeming like an empty promise without proof and assurance, he promises to substantiate it soon after with a tangible and visible demonstration (verse 28). This could be understood as his magnificent transfiguration a week later (Matthew 27:1,2), his glorious ascension in their sight (Acts 1:9), his outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon them in tongues of fire (Acts 2:2,3), or his fuller revelation of his Kingdom and Glory to his servant John through the ministry of angels, in his magnificent Revelation (Revelation 1:1). To all of these (though the context seems to relate mainly to the first), our Saviour's promise could be referring.

Therefore, the words are a description of a disciple of Christ; one who must deny himself, and not just in more comfortable matters, but thoroughly and in all things, to the extent of suffering, and suffering to the utmost - pain, death, disgrace, as these three elements are inherent in the Cross; and all of this, first, willingly - he must take up his Cross, it must be an act of choice, not of compulsion. Secondly, obediently, with the resolution of following Christ, both his Command and Example, as a Lord because he mandates it, and as a Leader because he precedes us in it.

I have singled out the topic of self-denial to discuss in this respected and serious gathering, as it is very relevant to the condition, not only of Christians at all times but particularly to the present era we live in and the special tasks we have been entrusted with. Here, after briefly considering what is meant by Denying, and what by a person's self, I shall quickly deal with the Doctrinal part according to those premises.

For the first, the original Greek word, "aparnēsasthō," is emphatic, as Chrysostom notes, and implies not just to deny, but to utterly and totally deny, not to spare or regard at all, as Theophylact and Soudas suggest: it denotes a perfect or universal denial. Beza translates it as "abdicet seipsum," which is equivalent to rejecting and casting off, as one would a wayward son, whom they will no longer acknowledge as their own - akin to what the Law calls 'Ignominiosa missio' in an Army.

In the scriptures, 'man' is most commonly interpreted in three ways - in terms of his creation, his heritage, or his renewal; the natural man, the old man, and the new man. Hence, 'a man's self', I understand to mean firstly, a man's sinful self; (to start with this aspect in line with our method of proceeding), which the Apostle refers to as the old



man (Ephesians 4:22), the earthly Adam (1 Corinthians 15:47,48), the body of death (Romans 7:24), the carnal mind (Romans 8:7), and our earthly members (Colossians 3:5). In this sense, to deny one's self is, in the Apostle's words, to deny ungodliness and worldly desires (Titus 2:12).

Secondly, it implies a man's natural self: firstly, in terms of existence and substance, thereby encompassing our life, which is the persistence and preservation of existence, and the faculties and powers of nature, including our understanding, will, appetites, senses, and bodily members. Secondly, in terms of well-being or the outward adornments and comforts of life, all of which can be categorised into three areas; 1. external relations, such as between husband and wife, parent and child, brother and brother, friend and friend, etc., 2. Special gifts and endowments, such as learning, wisdom, power, or any other mental or physical abilities, 3. Common objectives, which people naturally strive for and are encompassed by the Apostle under three heads - of profit, pleasure, and honour; the lusts of the eyes, the lusts of the flesh, and the pride of life (1 John 2:16). Houses, lands, lordships, vast possessions, worldly, natural, unnatural, artificial pleasures; liberty, praise, favour, applause, advancement: anything that brings a man any sort of contentment or satisfaction.

Thirdly, it means a man's moral, virtuous, renewed self; for as lusts are the members of the old man, so graces are the members of the new man. As the first Adam engenders us in his image (Genesis 5:3), so the second Adam regenerates us in his image (Colossians 3:10, 1 Corinthians 15:49, Romans 8:29). From the former we inherit lust for lust, and from the latter, grace for grace.

Having laid these premises, corresponding to this threefold concept of self, there are three aspects to the duty of self-denial: Some things are to be denied unequivocally and absolutely; some conditionally and under certain circumstances; and some comparatively and in certain respects.

1. A man should completely and unequivocally deny his sinful self in two ways; firstly, in a general sense, as it embodies the entirety of corruption and desire, which we are to suppress and conquer, to crucify and to avenge the blood of Christ against (Colossians 3:5, Romans 8:13). This requires a consistent effort, an active application of grace, because natural inclinations, such as lust, can return to their original state and strength if not continuously held in check. Just as a stone will fall to its natural place once the force lifting it is exhausted, and water will regain its natural coldness if not continuously heated. Grace, although it belongs to our renewed nature, may not suppress lust as easily as lust, without grace's influence, would return to its full strength. This is because there is a significant difference between lust and grace. Lust's workings are completely internal and require no external force or activity to set them in motion. They are always ready to regain their strength, even when weakened. Grace, on the other hand, though partly internal when vital principles and spiritual habits are infused, requires an active concurrence, cooperation, and assistance from the Spirit of Christ. It is Christ who enables us to will and act, similar to how a weapon has the potential to cut, or a wheel to move, yet they do not do so without a further vital force using them for these purposes. Hence, even though lust may naturally regain its strength without effort, there is a need for much diligence, and earnest reliance on Christ through faith and prayer, for the continuous supplies of His Spirit. This way, the

graces within us may constantly work in suppressing and conquering our desires. This is because the habits of grace infused do not work alone, without such supplies.

Secondly, we should deny our sinful selves specifically in regard to those personal corruptions that we are most notably drawn to, which David refers to as preserving oneself from one's own sin (Psalms 18:23). While natural corruption is a source of all sin, it usually manifests more distinctly in certain sins in particular individuals. As the sap of the earth nurtures all types of fruit, yet in one plot of land it produces wheat, in another barley, in one tree it becomes a grape, in another an olive: so too does original sin in one person lean more towards greed, in another towards sensuality, in a third towards pride and vanity, and so on. We read of national sins, such as the lying and laziness of the Cretans (Titus 1:12), the curiosity and inquisitiveness of the Athenians (Acts 17:21), the pride and cruelty of the Babylonians (Isaiah 47), and the theft of the Sabaeans and Chaldeans (Job 1:15, 17). We also read of personal sins, the stubbornness of Pharaoh, the dissent of Korah, the envy of Saul, the surliness of Nabal, the ambition of Absalom, the indulgence of Felix, the sorcery of Simon Magus, etc. Thus, individuals have their distinct sins by which they have most dishonoured God, opposed His Spirit, disregarded and resisted His grace, and tainted their own consciences. Therefore, in life, even though repentance, like a hound, drives the entire pack of sins before it, the dart of the Word sticks most in this particular sin, which is singled out for more specific detestation.

11. Conditionally, and upon the assumption of God's special calling, we're to deny our natural selves. We should, first, because God doesn't demand anyone to deny themselves entirely and for all purposes, at any time or under any circumstances. He allows us,

indeed, he insists that we seek the wellbeing of our souls, to pursue anything without which we cannot find happiness, to foster our own salvation in every way, to find ourselves outside of ourselves, in Christ and his righteousness. Secondly, because he never summons us to any form of severe, harsh, or superstitious self-denial, such as that of the miserly individual who, when lacking nothing he desires, lacks the ability and desire to enjoy it and deprives himself of goodness, even though the things God grants, he grants for us to enjoy (Ecclesiastes 4:8, 6:2, 1 Timothy 6:17). Or like the priests of Baal, or the sect of the Flagellantes, who self-harmed in their frenzied devotions, like Saire the Cafuist reports of Francis and Benedict, two initiators of the regular devotions or superstitions in the Roman Church, who were accustomed to cast themselves naked into snow, and amongst thorns to torment their bodies. A notable account of such self-denial (I'm uncertain if it's more unpleasant or superstitious), a learned and serious cleric of ours has extensively gathered from Climacus and Louis of Granada, in the fourth part of his Christian Warfare.

However, we are called by God to deny ourselves, our intellect, wisdom, skills, knowledge, comfort, wealth, lands, homes, honour, favour, reputation, acclaim, parents, spouses, children, life, whatever is most dear to us, whenever it stands in opposition to, or in competition with Christ, his glory, kingdom, or command. In this sense, we should always be ready to deny ourselves, and actually do so whenever something dear to us is inconsistent with our duty to God. And in this way, to give only instances from our own profession, Paul values neither liberty nor life over the gospel of grace, and the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 20:24, Acts 21:13). Micaiah neither his safety nor reputation in Ahab's court (1 Kings 22:14). Levi neither his parents, nor brothers, nor children in his zeal for God's honour

(Deuteronomy 33:9). Ezekiel neither his dear wife, the delight of his eyes, when God took her away suddenly and forbade him to mourn for her (Ezekiel 24:16-18). Matthew neither his customs post (Luke 5:27). James and John neither their nets, their ships, nor their father, when they were called to follow Christ (Matthew 4:21,22).

In such cases, things must be denied in two ways: Firstly, as temptations and traps, when they either lure us into sin or are themselves the outcomes and rewards of sin. If they are lures to sin, "If your brother," says the Lord, "the son of your mother, or your son or daughter, or the wife you love, or your closest friend secretly entices you, saying, 'Let us go and worship other gods,' gods that neither you nor your ancestors have known... You must not yield to or heed any such persons. Show them no pity or compassion and do not shield them" (Deuteronomy 13:6,8). Even if an idol is made of silver and gold, it must be discarded with disgust if it becomes an idol (Isaiah 30:22). If Simon Magus offers money for the gifts of the Spirit, the Apostle abhors such a dreadful negotiation (Acts 8:20). Even the bronze serpent, when it becomes a snare through men's misuse, is no longer preserved as a monument of mercy but smashed as a piece of brass (2 Kings 18:4). When they are themselves the outcomes and rewards of sin, Zacchaeus denies himself all his unjust gains, obtained through trickery and fraud, and when Christ offers to come to his house, he won't let wealth close the door on him (Luke 19:8). Restitution is one of the most challenging aspects of self-denial, particularly for a greedy heart that must regurgitate all its ill-gotten gains. Unjust gains are like barbed arrows; they kill if they remain within the body, and tear and pull flesh with them when removed; as the fox in the fable, who, having sneaked in through a narrow hole to feed on prey, found himself too large to escape through the same passage after feasting, and was forced to empty and starve himself again to escape the way he came.

II. As offerings and sacrifices, whenever Christ calls us to dedicate them to Him: when Abraham was called from his homeland into an unknown territory, when Daniel was called from a royal court to a den of lions, when Moses left the honour of Egypt for the trials of God's people, when the disciples abandoned their nets and ships to follow Christ and endure a persecuted ministry, when Paul moved from active to passive persecution - they didn't hesitate or consult with their own comfort, but willingly surrendered their personal comforts to obey God's commandments. Upon conversion, the use, the ownership of all we have is changed; all our assets, all our possessions must be inscribed with a new title, 'Holiness to the Lord' (Isaiah 23:18, Zechariah 14:20, 21). Then, our main concern will be to honour the Lord with our wealth (Proverbs 3:9), to bring our sons, our silver, our gold to the name of the Lord, the Holy One of Israel (Isaiah 60:9). All that we are, or have, we have on this condition: to use it, to leave it, to invest it, to lay it down for the honour of our Master, from whose generosity we received it.

III. Comparatively speaking, and in some respect, we are to deny even our renewed selves, our virtues and graces. In terms of duties, we're obligated to seek, to pray for, to practice, to enhance, to treasure and to highly value them: but in relation to righteousness, in terms of life and salvation covenant, and compared to Christ, we must consider all things as loss for the excellence of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord (Philippians 3:8, 9, 10). It's perilous to hang the weight of a soul upon anything that has a trace of weakness, imperfection, or corruption in it, like the purest and best of our duties have. It's dangerous to suggest that faith, or any other evangelical virtue, as a work done by us, can justify or replace legal obedience unto the purpose of life. There is nothing that can be called our righteousness but 'The Lord our Righteousness' (Jeremiah 23:6). Faith justifies like a window is said to enlighten, because it

alone is suited to convey and transmit that light which comes from, and belongs to another body, not to itself; thus, it doesn't justify habitually, as something fixed in us, but instrumentally, as that which receives and lets in the righteousness of Christ, shining through it upon us. The cup feeds by the wine it conveys; the mirror makes the wall glisten by reflecting the sunbeam from itself upon it.

In a nutshell, the point of it all is this: We all profess to be disciples of Christ and seek glory and immortality through Him, and we have all promised to follow Him wherever He leads us. Now, whoever wants to truly be what he promises and professes, must learn this fundamental duty - to deny himself, willingly and obediently to forsake all sin, to subdue all general desires, along with his own specific and personal corruptions, absolutely, without any limitations or exceptions. To always, in heart's preparation, cast away and forsake - and actually do so whenever Christ calls to it - whatever is near or dear to him, whenever it becomes either a snare to conscience, as a temptation to, or result of sin, or a sacrifice to God, as a matter of duty. To undervalue and disregard the best of all his graces compared to the righteousness of Christ and in terms of justification before God: considering everything - existence, well-being, external possessions, internal abilities, virtues, graces - as matters of no value or estimation, when Christ and the conscience of duty are in competition with them.

I've now finished with the doctrinal part of this topic, and I apologise for having detained a knowledgeable audience with matters already well known to them. I'll now move on to practical application.

It's said that when Christ preached this doctrine, he gathered the people to him along with his disciples (Mark 8:34). My exhortation,

in turn, to you and myself will be twofold: one as we are the people of Christ, and the other as we are his disciples and ministers.

As the people of Christ, let us be urged,

I. To beware of the sin that directly opposes self-denial, a sin that's profoundly detrimental and obstructs salvation, which is the sin of self-love, or self-admiration; an exceptionally expansive and generative vice that lies at the root of every other sin. For, at the heart of every sin is an excessive turn of a creature towards itself, and so it's placed by the Apostle at the forefront of a whole battalion of sins (2 Timothy 3:1,5). It branches out into two major sins: self-seeking, as an end, and self-reliance, as a means to that end (for, those who work for themselves will likely work from themselves too.)

Self-seeking is when individuals pay no heed to the will and call of God, nor to the needs and welfare of others, but are entirely engrossed in serving their own wills and desires, pursuing their own interests, and not the concerns of Jesus Christ (Philippians 2:21). Like the prophet's barren vine, they bear fruit only for themselves (Hosea 10:1), they obey their own wills against God's (Jeremiah 18:12, 44:17), giving in to the temptation of their own lusts (James 1:14), they let their own judgement dictate right and wrong (Judges 17:6). From this comes prideful arguments and resistance against the truth; deceitfulness of heart in God's covenant; defection from his service; reliance upon our own wisdom, along with many disturbed and stubborn passions that typically accompany a will wedded to itself. Now, this kind of self-love, our Saviour tells us, is in fact the greatest self-hatred imaginable. "Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (verse 25). Our love and our life should always go hand in hand, for all things are loved in pursuit of life. That which is the source of our life should



be the object of our love. If anyone has life from himself, that person's love may rest in himself. However, the Apostle tells us that Christ is our life (Colossians 3:4, Galatians 2:20) - for the life we have without him is merely a step towards death - and therefore he must be our love too, as Ignatius called him. His goal, his will, his wisdom must be ours. Just as all rivers run into the sea and do not remain within themselves, thus avoiding harm. If the sun were to keep its light, the clouds their rain, the earth its sap to themselves, what purpose would they serve, or benefit would they provide? God has created everything in such a harmonious hierarchy that each entity, serving what's above itself - the inanimate serving the animate, and both serving man, and man serving God - all the services of all creatures should ultimately converge and flow into God, who alone is worthy of all service and obedience.

Self-reliance is when we place our trust, for spiritual goals relating to righteousness and salvation, in our own virtues. When we anticipate forgiveness of sin, God's favour, and ultimate happiness from our own deeds, much like the Jews did (Romans 10:3). And when, for other societal and public purposes, we place our trust in men, strategies, military might, wealth, or human power, rising and falling, gaining confidence and losing hope according to the fluctuations of secondary causes. This is a sin we're all too guilty of in these times and, as such, we have greatly provoked God. He could justly abandon us, so that when we find ourselves helpless, we're forced to seek mercy in Him. This sin is highly offensive to God's love, power, wisdom, mercy, and truth, all divine attributes where our trust should be securely anchored. For these attributes are unchanging, always constant, ever equally close to us, caring for us, ready to work for our benefit. As such, there should not be such shifts, such risings and falls in our reliance on Him.

However, we frail humans are like a ship at anchor. Even though the anchor is secured to a stable rock, which doesn't move, the ship is still subject to tossing and unrest when buffeted by winds and waves. Similarly, even though our anchor of confidence is grounded in something stable and steadfast, our hearts are too prone to wavering and change, depending on the varying impact of secondary causes. Sometimes we might say, with David, "I shall never be moved," and then, when circumstances change, we become faint-hearted and distressed again. Therefore, we should strive and pray for a more steady and composed state of mind: Don't say at one point, "The enemy is strong, now we'll be defeated," and at another time, "The enemy is weak, now we'll prevail, and our troubles will end."

Instead, we should learn to hold the Lord God of Hosts in reverence in our hearts, let Him be our fear, and let Him be our hope. When He humbles us, let us fear, yet still trust in Him, because if we repent and return, He will lift us up (for, it makes no difference to Him whether He helps with many or those that have no power). And when He exalts us, let us rejoice, and yet still tremble, because if we become arrogant and provoke Him, He lifts us up in anger, to make our downfall greater, as the Psalmist speaks, "You have lifted me up and cast me down."

Let's strongly urge one another to perform this duty, as it is fundamentally essential for our salvation. For this, we should learn and implement these concise yet valuable rules.

1. Elevate God's Word and guidance in our judgment. In matters of faith, worship, and obedience, let's draw our wisdom from Him and not rely on our own understanding or consider ourselves self-wise (Proverbs 23:4, Isaiah 5:21). We must not let natural

and worldly reasoning overshadow or sidestep any divine truth that could restrain our desires or guide our conscience.

2. Raise God's authority in our wills, echoing Paul's words, "Lord, what do you want me to do?" This is the crucial point on which all duty hangs. The key disagreement between God and sinners is whose will shall prevail: theirs or His. As Bernard aptly stated, "When personal will ceases, there is no hell." Overcoming our will is like conquering Hell itself.
3. Enhance God's honour in all our aspirations. We should accept our circumstances, be they favourable or adverse, if they contribute to God's glory and the exaltation of His name. Let's adopt David's attitude: if he finds favour in God's eyes, he believes God will guide him and show him His dwelling place. However, if God is not pleased with him, he submits to God's will (2 Samuel 15:25-26). Like Job, we should bless God's name regardless of whether He gives or takes away (Job 1:21), and like Paul, we should seek to magnify Christ in our lives or deaths (Philippians 1:20). It is more fitting that God should have His honour, rather than us seeking our own comfort.
4. Position the love of Christ and His Church at the forefront of our hearts. This love will guide us and inspire us to contribute to public service. Like Jonah, we should be willing to be sacrificed for the greater good, to calm the storm. Like Esther, we must be prepared to risk our own lives, and like Paul, we should be willing to give and be used for others, even if our love is not reciprocated.

This public love will diminish our personal interests. Just like Elisha questioned Gehazi, we should ask ourselves if it's a time to accumulate wealth and possessions (2 Kings 5:16), or like Jeremiah

asked Baruch, if it's right to seek great things for oneself when the Lord is breaking down and uprooting (Jeremiah 45:4-5).

Indeed, a person who puts his own private and base objectives above the welfare of his brethren, who doesn't care how he robs, defrauds, destroys, and selfishly exploits the public calamity for his own benefit, can hardly expect mercy from Christ without deep repentance and restitution. If the guilt of unjust gain has ever been condemned; if ill-acquired wealth has ever been pursued by a curse; if wealth gained through wrong means has ever been met with punishment; if lands bought through wrongdoing have ever been turned into a wasteland; if homes built on injustice have ever been consumed by fire; if people who unjustly increase their wealth or build with blood have ever been hunted by disaster; such individuals must expect God's wrath to poison such ill-gotten gains. They will never enjoy them with peace in their lives, nor leave them in peace at their death, nor pass them on to their offspring without a curse. As Proverbs 21:7 states, "The robbery of the wicked shall destroy them."

To ignite our commitment to this necessary duty, there are two noteworthy encouragements in the text.

1. It allows us to bear our cross humbly, willingly, and obediently, accepting and enduring whatever affliction God places upon us. The less we esteem ourselves, the more equipped we will be to handle any hardships that confront us. We remain unfazed by the shattering of a clay or wooden vessel, but if a diamond or precious jewel is marred, it deeply affects us. The more insignificant we view ourselves, the more untroubled we will remain when any mishap or rupture occurs to us. "Who am I to contest with God, or question the ways of His providence?" we should wonder. "Why should I regard myself wise enough to

instruct, or grand enough to resist the will of my Master?" Why should a servant consider himself too fragile to bear the load, or his hands too delicate to perform the work that his Master willingly endured before him? Did Christ bear a cross to save me? Shouldn't I do the same to serve Him? Did He carry His, the most burdensome ever shouldered by a man? Shouldn't I carry mine, which He, through His own, has made so light and manageable? Indeed, if we could perceive things as they are in the eyes of God, angels, and righteous people, shame would be esteemed a matter of honour and glory when endured for Christ. The Apostles departed from the Council rejoicing that they were dishonoured yet dignified, granted the honour of suffering shame for the name of Christ (Acts 5:41).

2. It empowers us to follow Christ in all duties of obedience. When I can say, "not my will," I'll soon say, "Thy will be done"; I'll follow Him as a Lord. There's no attribute more vital to service than self-denial: Christ Himself, though by His stature He was free, still, being in the form of a servant, did not seek, nor do His own will, but the will of Him who sent Him (John 5:30. & 6:38). I will follow Him as an example, for He encourages us to emulate what He commands, through His own deeds (John 13:15) . Legal obedience lies in hearing and doing; but Evangelical obedience is predominantly in hearing and imitating (1 Peter 2:21). . For this purpose, we were predestined and called, that we might conform to Him, heed Him in all things He shall say (Acts 3:22), and follow Him wherever He may lead (Revelation 14:4). Our role is to relinquish ourselves in all matters to His wisdom and His will, without consultation of flesh or blood in His service. This is the loftiest and noblest disposition of a child of God, mirroring Christ most closely by setting aside all self-

interests in every matter wherein His Master is to be served and glorified.

Self-seeking invariably stems from a lesser mind. The more truly and spiritually noble a person is, the more they are driven by the honour of God, and the welfare of Church and State. Observe the creatures around us: those living solely for themselves are either base or wild, mean or tyrannical. Worms, caterpillars, weasels, mice, rats, live and eat only for themselves, demonstrating their baseness. Lions, wolves, leopards, tigers prey and plunder only for themselves; they don't till your land, carry your burdens, or obey your commands; this is their wildness. But the noblest creatures, like the sun, moon, and stars, serve the greater good within their spheres of activity, the breadth of which is a measure of their nobility. God has instilled a natural self-denial in all creatures. Light things move downward, and heavy things upward, to maintain the balance of nature. He has even instilled a form of moral self-denial in heathens, where they prioritise public safety and interest above themselves.

However, we never truly transcend our self-interest until Christ has claimed us, dividing all that we are between Himself and His Church, empowering us to reject Satan's temptations. When Satan calls upon our wit to be flippant or offensive; our reason to be arrogant or heretical; our will to be stubborn or contrary; our passion to be unruly or violent; our power to be insolent or harmful; our wisdom to be cunning or dishonest; our learning to be conceited or pompous; our wealth to be decadent; our ambition to be overreaching, or the like: we can respond, "I am neither yours, nor my own; I was purchased at a price, and belong to He who paid so dearly for me. He denied Himself to purchase me, I will deny myself to serve Him. I won't be so foolish as to lose my soul by being ungrateful for its salvation, or to forfeit Christ by serving His enemy, thus destroying

myself." Now we move from the exhortation concerning us as the People of Christ, to the one concerning us as His Disciples and Ministers.

This task is comprised of two parts. 1. That we would pray for, and 2. That we would practise this noble duty. Let's contemplate the following to motivate us towards both:

1. Nothing in the world poses a greater threat to the welfare of nations or churches than personal self-interest. A single faulty cog can derail the function of a complex machine. A solitary string on a lute, playing its own dissonant tune, will throw the entire melody off balance. One self-seeking individual, seduced by a piece of gold and a luxurious garment, nearly brought disaster upon the camp of Israel. Self-interest always hinders public responsibilities: "What about my hundred talents?" will be a potent obstacle against making a necessary decision.

Personal interest led Pharaoh to oppress Israel, fearing that they would become too strong (Exodus 1:10). It was personal interest that moved Jeroboam to install the calves at Dan and Bethel, worrying that a unified worship could reunite the ten tribes with the house of David (1 Kings 12:26-28). Personal interest led the Jews to crucify the Lord of glory, with the concern that "if we let this man alone, the Romans will come and destroy our place and nation" (John 11:48). Indeed, there was a public expectation of a great prince to rise from Judea, who was destined to rule the world, which the Romans erroneously believed was fulfilled when Vespasian, who had once governed that province, ascended to the Empire. Personal interest led Demetrius and the craftsmen to exalt Diana and condemn the Gospel (Acts 19:24-27). Just as small ditches can divert a mighty

river from its course, or a tumour can draw nutrients from the rest of the body, private gain inevitably detracts from the collective good.

2. Conversely, self-denial serves as a remarkable preparation for significant tasks. The more humble and unassuming we are in our own eyes, the more suited we are to be used by God, who pours His grace into broken vessels. When God proposed to Moses to wipe out Israel and create a great nation from him, Moses felt no attraction to such advancement. His sense of duty to God's people overrode any familial loyalty or domestic interests (Exodus 32:10-11). Joshua, his successor, distributed the land of Canaan among the tribes and didn't claim any portion for himself until the public had been served, a task he entrusted to the people (Joshua 19:48).

In Nehemiah's time, when God's people were afflicted, Nehemiah refrained from exacerbating their suffering with any oppressive or violent actions. Instead, he renounced much of his own rights and declined the governor's bread (Nehemiah 5:14). Solomon didn't ask for wealth or revenge, or anything of personal benefit, but rather for a public grace – the spirit of wisdom to govern (1 Kings 3:9). He already possessed a leader's heart, which guided him to pray for a leader's mind too.

Consider how humble David was in his own eyes when God chose him to shepherd His people. "Who am I? What is my father's house, that you have brought me this far?" (2 Samuel 7:28). How deeply did Moses underestimate himself – even to a fault – when chosen for a great task? "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh? I am not eloquent, I am slow of speech and slow of tongue" (Exodus 3:11 & 4:10). Although there was an element of self-protection in his refusal – a fear of enemies which God recognised when He told Moses that



those who sought his life were dead (Exodus 4:19) – I believe Moses genuinely felt himself unsuitable for the mission, just as he had expressed.

Similarly, the great prophet Isaiah lamented, "Woe is me, I am undone; for I am a man of unclean lips" (Isaiah 6:5). So too Paul, "I was a blasphemer, a persecutor, injurious; and yet I obtained mercy," the mercy of pardon, the mercy of duty; the grace to be a saint, the grace to be an apostle. "The worst of sinners, the least of saints; and yet the apostle who laboured more abundantly than all the rest" (1 Corinthians 15:10).

Before we use large timber in buildings, we expose it to the wind and sun to draw out its inherent moisture. Before we use bricks, we remove the clay's softness through hardening in a furnace, making it fit for service. We can't turn stones into lime and mortar until we've dissolved their natural hardness through the fire's heat. Likewise, the Lord humbles us and extracts self-focused tendencies before He entrusts His servants with great tasks. High buildings need deep foundations; tall cedars, deep roots. The richest treasures are mined from the deepest depths. God lays the groundwork for grand works in unassuming and self-effacing instruments, even in seemingly insignificant beginnings, so that He may receive the greater glory.

How esteemed was the Virgin Mary to be the mother of God? She can tell us about the humble foundation God laid for this honour: "He had respect to the low estate of His handmaid" (Luke 1:48). Which virtues does Christ select as the keys to eternal life but self-denying ones? Faith and repentance. The former teaching us to move beyond ourselves, the latter leading us to abhor our selves.

3. Consider once more, all walks of life are exceedingly susceptible to the temptation of self-interest. Some individuals profit from

societal unrest; if conflicts were resolved and a satisfactory conclusion put to these miseries, their positions, commands, advantages, and roles would cease. They would then have to revert to their previous, lesser states. Others benefit from human failings, from sensuality, luxury, recklessness, excess, spite, disputes; some from one vice, others from another. If there were to be a too rigid reformation and judgement over these excesses, far less water would drive their mill. Similar to John the Baptist, they might say of Christ, "If he increases, we must decrease".

We in our profession also face our own temptations. If such devotion is demanded, such frequent preaching, humility, gratitude, admonition, oversight; the regular demands and duties of our role would mean we must bid farewell to all outward peace and tranquility, and resolve never to possess control of ourselves again. Examples in this vein could be ceaselessly found, from the throne to the plough.

Given this, it greatly behooves us, who are the Lord's reminders, to fervently pray for an expansive spirit of self-denial upon all those in public service, others and ourselves included. That God would safeguard us from this perilous temptation. That He would rid us of our inherent desires and failings, anything that might make us distort, shrink, crack, and become unserviceable to the state, the church, the community to which we belong.

An alien woman marrying an Israelite had to shave and pare herself, as if removing her prior form, before becoming an Israelite. Pharaoh's daughter wasn't a suitable wife for Solomon until she forgot her own people and her father's house (Psalm 45:10). Rahab, Babylon, Tyre, Ethiopia, Philistia, all had to renounce their natural

and Gentile privileges, and trace their lineage back to Zion before they could contribute to God's service and glory. "All my springs," says the psalmist speaking of Zion, "are in thee" (Psalm 87). A person who only works for and from himself is like a stagnant lake, a harbour for toads and pests, of little use, of no pure use at all. But those who deny themselves, and work for God and from God, are like the streams of a spring. Their sweetness and purity, flowing from the springs and fountains of Zion, make them suitable for their Master's use, and prepared for every good work.

Thus, let us pray for all those in public roles, that God would grant them public-spirited attitudes.

For the King's Majesty, may God fill his heart with this remarkable grace, and with the love of common wellbeing above all personal concerns or interests. May he lament for his people as David did, questioning, "What have these sheep done, that they should suffer such harsh realities due to my dispute?" May God mercifully prevent him from allying with the adversaries of pure religion - endangering it - for the promotion of such ends that those enemies of God, based on the principles and practices of their religion, are more likely in the end to betray and destroy than to foster or maintain.

For Parliament, may God bestow upon them a double portion of the spirit of self-denial. As they have renounced their comfort, pleasures, and wealth, and tirelessly wrestled with monumental challenges to protect public liberty and reform, may God keep it always in their thoughts and determinations to seek the people's prosperity. As Mordecai did, may they speak peace to them and their descendants (Esther 10:3). May God prompt them to consistently speak kindly to the Levites who teach the good knowledge of the Lord, and command them to remove all impurities from the sacred place, as good

Hezekiah did (2 Chronicles 29:5, 30:22). May no suspicions ever sever them, but may piety and wisdom harmoniously bind together civil and ecclesiastical administrations in matters related to God and His house.

For the Armed Forces, may God imbue them with the noble spirit of self-denial and guide them with His power and blessings to unwaveringly fulfil the duties they are entrusted with. May nothing but the solitary desire for a happy and well-founded peace invigorate the sword of war.

For ourselves, may we deny ourselves in all matters of duty and service. It is an exceptional mercy from Christ to us, to manage the affairs of His Church in such a way that the reverence of His ministers and their roles should be entwined and associated with His own honour. As He said, "Whoever listens to you, listens to me; and whoever disregards you, disregards me." Anyone who holds honourable thoughts of Christ through our ministry cannot help but respect us, and appreciate the feet of those who bring such glad tidings to them. And any claimed zeal for piety that is accompanied by disrespect or undervaluing of the Ministers of the Gospel is nothing but hypocrisy. The Galatians welcomed Paul as an Angel of God, indeed, as Christ Himself, and would have gouged out their own eyes to give them to him. But although Christ has intertwined these things, it is our duty in all our intentions to separate and detach our Master's interests from our own reward; to seek only Christ's honour and leave our own to Him.

I do not dare to believe or suspect that in any of our humble suggestions and petitions to the honourable Houses of Parliament, we have pursued any personal interest. Rather, we have aimed solely for the service we believe Christ has entrusted to His ministers. Even

though some harbour suspicions, let us be careful not to justify these suspicions. Let us pray for humble and self-denying hearts, that God would empower us to navigate both criticism and praise, and equip us with such spiritual meekness and wisdom that we may demonstrate to the conscience of all, even of our enemies, that as we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus the Lord, we seek not ourselves or our own interests, but the interests of Jesus Christ. We do not seek dominion over God's people but desire only to aid their joy, further their salvation, and serve them for the sake of Jesus.

I've completed the first part of my exhortation, encouraging us to pray on behalf of ourselves and others, for God to bestow this exceptional grace upon all entrusted with public services. Given more forethought, I would have also added an exhortation for each of us in our Ministry, to urge and impress the importance of this duty upon our congregations, especially when we preach before those summoned to public responsibilities, where the management of significant and common matters is vested. For, it's certain that those who are self-seeking can never faithfully serve the public.

I now move onto the last part of my application, i.e., an exhortation for us to practise this heavenly duty. Here, I can only present an outline, bare traces of what could have been more fully expanded. I shall divide this exhortation into two parts: one concerning our general Ministry, the other concerning our specific role in serving this Assembly.

Regarding the former (I need not speak about the third form of self-denial, as I assume none of us here or in our Ministry would value their own graces so much as to seek righteousness from them or pin

salvation on them), let me, of the first two forms, ask for leave to offer a word or two.

Firstly, that we strive to deny ourselves in those more distinct and unique failings to which we, as Ministers of the Gospel, are prone. Many specifics could be highlighted, but I will mention just two for now: the fondness for New Lights in Doctrine, and for New interpretations and Expositions of Scripture.

Regarding the first, in this age of Liberty (for such individuals usually seize turbulent and restless times, as learned Civilian Petrus Aerodius tells us), there are many restless and fanciful minds, people of Athenian temperament, who devote all their time merely to hear and discuss some New Theology. They chase after excessively lofty notions and obscure, metaphysical, unheard-of fantasies, not contenting themselves with the wholesome form of sound words and the overall harmony of Orthodox Doctrine. They steer all their mental studies and explorations towards unknown theology, to practise new experiments and make new discoveries. Personally, I've never approved of Projectors of any sort, as they typically deceive others and ruin themselves. But a Projector in Learning is most unfortunate, and there's no learning more hazardous than a Projector in Theology, the most likely path to first becoming a Sceptic, then a Heretic, and ultimately an Atheist. Such were the ancient heretics of old - Valentinus, Basilides, Montanus, Marcus, and others, who, as Eusebius tells us, used to bewilder people with strange words and unintelligible expressions, to draw them first into admiration and then into belief. Such were also, in the later age of the Church, Faustus Socinus, and Conradus Vorstius, and several others, whose corrupt and audacious doctrines spread like a gangrene and grievously infected the Churches of Christ in other countries. And many such individuals are likely to emerge and

multiply in these Kingdoms (formerly renowned for unity in Doctrine) if the notions of New Light, and Liberty of Conscience (erroneously so-called) should continue and prevail. We already have one tragic example of this in the monstrous and utterly reprehensible blasphemies of a Socinian heretic, not to mention any other disorders.

I have no doubt that when the prophecies of Scripture, concerning the future affairs of the Church (of which I believe there are many), are fulfilled, they will shed much more light on understanding such predictions than is currently possible while they remain unfulfilled. After all, the fulfilment of prophecies provides the best and most reliable interpretation of them. However, in doctrinal and evangelical matters, in matters of faith, duty, and godliness (which should undoubtedly be the main focus of our preaching), to champion 'New Lights', and to bewilder people with metaphysical fantasies and complex interpretations as if they were profound heavenly mysteries - while neglecting the preaching of duty and the essential, life-changing principles of repentance and new obedience - is the quickest way to introduce scepticism into the Church. It is far more likely to make people question the truth of what they have previously learned than to help them gain any certain knowledge of the new teachings being imparted to them. In this respect, let ministerial prudence and zeal for the souls of our listeners, and for the peace of the Church, guide us to reject all pride and capriciousness of wit, which might tempt and lead us into tangents, and make us preoccupy ourselves with discovering a 'Northwest passage' (if I may say so) to heaven. Instead, let us be content with words of truth and soberness, with the wholesome form of sound words, so that we can be workers who are unashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth and revealing God's will to the consciences of our listeners through clear evidence of the spirit and power. Thus,

their convictions being affirmed and the secrets of their hearts laid bare, they may fall down and worship God, acknowledging that God truly dwells within us.

Secondly, we must learn to deny ourselves in the pursuit of new senses and interpretations of Scripture, resisting the urge to allow our wits and fancies to object to the pious and solid expositions of other learned individuals. We know how the pursuit of allegories and forced allusions by Origen and some other ancients, and the fondness for esoteric interpretations among many Rabbinical scholars, have grossly twisted and abused the holy Text. According to the judgement of the Apostle Peter, this is no small sin (2 Peter 3:16). The Donatists' audacious interpretation of 'Dic ubi cubas in meridie' in defence of their African Schism serves as a prime example of such misinterpretation. But, in the same way that Juvenal said we owe the utmost respect to children, we must remember that we owe immense reverence and veneration to the Holy Scriptures. We should not attempt to interpret them without due modesty, seriousness, and godly fear. I do not deny that we may share our own private interpretations of any part of Scripture, even if unobserved by others before us (for revelations may come to another that a predecessor had not discerned). However, I disapprove of the desire to find something new and unusual in everything we read, even if it's plain, straightforward, and has been literally and clearly interpreted by others; the preconceived notion towards the works of our fellow scholars and a readiness to identify faults and shortcomings in what they have previously accomplished. So, whenever we deem it necessary to interject our own opinion or interpretation, let us do so with humility and deference, maintaining respect and reverence for those from whom we differ; not dogmatically or imperiously, as if we were uttering divine pronouncements rather than opinions. Secondly, let's be careful not to stray even a hair's breadth from the



standard of faith and that knowledge which promotes godliness, into diversions of fancy or critical curiosity. Instead, let's always deem those interpretations the best and most reliable which are most orthodox, practical, heavenly, and most conducive to the promotion of duty and godliness.

Secondly, in relation to the second form of self-denial, let us learn to surrender our personal desires in the service of Christ's Church; to give our all, and like glowing lights, be content to wear out and be consumed in our Master's service. Many factors will require us to perform this duty.

Firstly, people are prone to hold biases and suspicions against us. Some may perceive us as if we're orchestrating a grand scheme, seeking dominance, or aiming for personal gain. Many also view the external circumstances and prosperity of Ministers with a critical eye. They're quick to challenge us, ready to conspire and petition against us regarding our maintenance. They believe we should live on lesser clothes, a simpler diet, limited accommodation, with overall more modest provisions deemed good enough and much more suitable for us. In such cases, it's our duty to uphold and defend the rights of our ministry and the dignity of our status. We cannot, without an unworthy lack of courage, surrender the rights that belong to our roles. The Apostle Paul takes pride in his office, and so must we in our respective capacities. He argues for double honour on behalf of those who labour in the Word and Doctrine, and so may we. However, because these are matters concerning our own order, and therefore we could be perceived as biased in the discharge of such duties, as if we were self-serving, we must act with such delicacy as to silence those who look for opportunities against us. Through our humility, gentleness, innocence, wisdom, dismissal of the world and its pleasures, not indulging in vanity, frivolity, or excess, and by

demonstrating our generosity and kindness, assisting the needs of the faithful, making it clear that all we have is dedicated to the Lord, we can quell the ignorance of the uninformed and the slander of the envious.

Secondly, the lack of understanding among many individuals, who have limited knowledge and narrow perspectives, also calls upon us to downplay our own intellect and learning. Even if we could offer a banquet of robust intellectual fare, we must instead offer simpler sustenance for such individuals. Like the Apostle, we must adapt to all people, so that by all means we may save some. Depending on the situation, we might need to raise the main sails or reduce their spread to move faster. Paul engaged in complex debate with the philosophers in Athens, but used simple, accessible language when teaching the servants and children in Ephesus.

Thirdly, the arrogance, stubbornness, and whims of people will often remind us of this duty. Generally, people expect to be appeased and flattered when, in fact, they should be admonished by us. Our connections with them, our dependence on them, might discourage us from sharing uncomfortable truths for fear of damaging our reputation or losing their support. In such cases, we must decide to forgo these relations, these dependencies, to prioritise God's truth and our duty over human favour, even if the more we show love, the less we receive in return. Fearfulness in a Minister is even more disgraceful than in a soldier, considering our spiritual warfare is more noble. A truthful reprimand will, in the end, garner more love and respect than a deceitful and sycophantic evasion. Although Paul rebuked Peter's hypocrisy, Peter later praised Paul's wisdom. A person's worst enemy is often a flatterer. There's no worse enemy in the world than a fawning Minister who lacks the courage to confront

a person's conscience honestly. We pose a greater risk to people's souls through excessive praise than through admonishment.

Lastly, the distressed state of the Church of God during these tumultuous times predominantly compels us towards this duty of self-denial. We should strive more to secure the wellbeing of the collective and to mend the painful divisions among us, rather than prioritising our own objectives or benefiting ourselves. In this regard, we must learn to deny two things.

Firstly, we should deny our personal interests when considering the collective safety. May it never cross our minds to wish for or be satisfied with ongoing discord, to keep the differences and divisions alive until the balance between factions can be restored, or until we find better ways to further our interests over time. It's distressing that thoughts of sides and parties should ever exist among brothers, especially when Churches and Kingdoms are in turmoil. You may recall the story from Plutarch of Themistocles and Aristides, two significant leaders who, despite their private disagreements, were known to set aside their differences when given a public duty, whether military or civil, for the good of their country. They would leave their animosities at the city gates and proceed with unity and harmony in their common affairs. It's an admirable example and worthy of Christians' emulation.

Secondly, we should deny our private judgments and opinions to the extent that they do not exacerbate the wounds and deepen the divisions of a suffering Church by inappropriately asserting and defending them. Provided that these are not inherently matters of faith and moral duty, but merely problematic matters of personal persuasion, devout individuals may hold differing views without breaking love or jeopardising salvation. I've long held the opinion

that a divided ministry in this Kingdom, comprising Conformists and Non-conformists, was stoked by an Episcopal interest. The intent being that, with some zealous on one side and others on the other, they would always have subjects for their authority to work upon, both for their reproaches and their favours. This is perhaps why, when former ceremonies became more generally accepted, the practice of more contentious ones began to be introduced, to maintain a distinction between Ministers and thereby fuel Episcopal power. Similar to how vipers and flesh are added to barrels of wine, so that by feeding on them, the wine may prevent its own degradation. But what should be the cause now that we still must have a divided ministry? Why should those who were formerly united in suffering, like Petrus Alexandrinus and Meletius (as Epiphanius recounts), split over minor differences and segregate from each other? Who benefits from these divisions? Who derives the most pleasure from such schisms? Who stands to gain more from the divisions among brothers than those who are adversaries to both parties?

For the sake of the Lord, let's take this to heart, and the more we witness our common enemy reveling and exulting in it, let's grieve and feel ashamed of it even more. We must endeavour to blunt the sharpness of prejudice and bitterness. When sheep butt heads against one another, it forebodes foul weather. Not only our fasting and praying, but also our studying, our exertion, our bleeding, even our dying, would be worthwhile to restore peace to the Church and unity among brethren once again. Why shouldn't the world now say of us, as it used to of Christians, 'Look at how they love one another?' Certainly, biting, devouring, criticising, undermining, and venting prejudices, tactics, and passions against each other may occur amongst good men due to human weakness, but I am sure it is the thorn and prickle, not the rose or flower, which grows on that tree.

I will add just one more point to this and then conclude. No one should allow their private perceptions, even if they appear to embody humility and self-denial, to prejudice a public and general right. No individual can extinguish a common property through disclaiming it. In a partnership or fellowship, the rule of civil law, based on clear reason, is this: it is not the private interest of a single partner that should be preserved, but rather what benefits the partnership. Furthermore, no one can rightfully do anything against another's wishes in a shared matter.

Therefore, the Apostle, when for significant reasons he personally chose not to receive support from the Churches of Achata, took the time to write an entire chapter to uphold and assert the rightful claim of the Gospel's Ministers to maintenance. This was to prevent his own act of self-denial (necessary for him at that time) from prejudicing the ongoing and common interests of all the Ministers of the Gospel. Indeed, if I held a unique opinion on matters not essential for salvation, differing from everyone else's opinion, and had enough confidence to value it, the intelligence to argue for it, the wisdom to manage it into plausible correspondences, and the audacity to disregard the judgement of all other godly men regarding it, I hope either modesty or piety would compel me to keep such a persuasion to myself. And certainly not to impose it inappropriately, offend my brethren, and disrupt the Church of God.

I have but three short words more of advice for us concerning our service in this reverend Assembly, and then I shall conclude. They are that, with respect to our service, we should learn to deny ourselves.

Firstly, we should deny ourselves in our private affairs, schedules, and opportunities. We must not let these impede or obstruct public

service in any way. The eyes of friends are upon us, anticipating our speed; the eyes of enemies are scornfully highlighting and ridiculing our slowness; the eyes of other Churches abroad look to us as healers and menders of divisions in these tumultuous and divided times, eager to see the fruits of our efforts. Let these considerations motivate us not to grow weary or lose heart, but to do our utmost to uncover truth and restore peace to these torn and suffering Churches.

Secondly, in our speeches and debates: Some people have an incredible ability to speak eloquently and at length, a talent which I admire all the more, given my own difficulty with swiftly formulating or expressing my thoughts. However, considering the urgency of the work ahead of us, I humbly suggest it would be better to be concise like Aristotle rather than verbose like Cicero; to deliver succinct arguments rather than lengthy orations. As the saying goes, "There's no time for singing when action is needed."

Lastly, in matters of difference, should they arise, we must strive primarily to deny ourselves. Passions rarely serve serious matters well, often clouding our judgement with mist and darkness. The more heavenly the mind, the calmer and clearer it becomes; less prone to agitation. The eloquence of Ulysses is praised by Homer for being like a shower of snow: falling softly, but soaking deep. Meanwhile, violent and hasty rain runs off the ground before it can penetrate. Jonah and Christ both slept during tempests at sea. While I'm not fond of allegories, allow me to draw this analogy: Our prophetic, our Christian temper is too often asleep when we are agitated and overwhelmed with passion.

I conclude with the words of the Apostle, "Each of you should not just look to your own interests, but also to the interests of others."

Embody the same mindset as Christ Jesus, who, though being in the form of God, did not consider equality with God something to cling to, but humbled himself, emptied himself, and disregarded his reputation, assuming the form of a servant. And though being Lord of all, he became obedient; and though being the Lord of Life, he was obedient to death; and even as the Lord of Glory, he obeyed to the point of dying on the cross. If our Lord and Master denied himself so profoundly to save and redeem his Church, let it not be a burden for us to deny ourselves to serve and edify the Church.

THE END.

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