

ashes under him." The self-denial of Christ was not in the austerities of John the Baptist, living apart from the world, neither eating nor drinking as other men, and wearing a rude garment of camel's hair.

He lived, dressed, ate and spoke as other men, conformed to the ordinary customs of common life, went to the festive meeting, as well as to the sick-bed, and house of mourning. Spent one night at a marriage-feast, and another at solitary prayer on a mountain side. And yet the Spirit of self-denial was being exercised in him, in both alike, yet he was restraining, disciplining himself to a degree far greater than John the Baptist, far greater than the most wretched ascetic that ever crouched in monkish cell, yet he was practising incessantly that self-denial it is for us to understand and to follow.

What then is implied in Christian self-denial? This first of all. A denying ourselves to everything *in itself sinful*.

"Let every one that nameth the name of Christ be careful to depart from iniquity." From that and a multitude of other texts we learn that there are certain things inherently bad, certain phases of thought and feeling, certain forthputtings of desire, of passion, of volition, God has branded as iniquity. And the first absolute demand made on entering on the Christian life is that we resolutely set ourselves against these. That we not only refrain from the outward act and expression, but that we endeavor as well, to overcome the latent cause, as Scripture expresses it, "putting off the old man," mortifying our members," "crucifying the flesh."

Self-denial then, you can see, will vary in its special character with the character of the man. Every man has his peculiar besetting sins. What would imply much restraint in one, is done without effort by another. The passion that rules in one is scarce felt in another. The *desire* that holds the will enslaved in your neighbour is weak or dormant in you, and therefore the self-denial he must practise, must thus far differ from yours.

There is a tendency amongst us to conclude that the things to which we are to deny ourselves are those we see ruling in other people, instead of those we find ruling in ourselves. And thus our self-denial becomes easy when we refrain only from those things to which we have no bearing. This is not the self-denial Christ looks for. He speaks to the *drunkard*, to the *sensualist*, and he says: In these appetites of yours is your besetting sin, against these it is your duty to struggle. He speaks to the *avaricious* man, and his word is: If you will come after me, you must curb that incessant craving for more, more of what cannot satisfy and supplant me in your heart.

It matters not so much what sins in others are not in us, as what sins *once* in us are *not* in us *now*. It matters not perhaps, that the *avaricious* man is not a drunkard, since avar-

rice may be his only besetting sin. It matters not in measuring the self-denial of the *passionate* man, that he is unspotted in character, without guile, without covetousness, since he has set no restraint upon his *temper*. He has not denied himself till he can check in his heart the rising storm, till feeling the angry word on his tongue, he can close his lips ere it be spoken.

We are to deny ourselves, to the evils that are in ourselves. And more, we are to deny ourselves to them when they are *strong*. It is not enough for a man to resolve to be honest and sober and virtuous, and shew no outbursts of temper, after circumstances have changed, and after years perhaps have seen his desires and passions naturally dying out. It's one thing for a propensity to disappear by a natural fading of the fire. It's another thing, that it be restrained in the day of its power.

No thanks to you *man* who has become *old in sin*, and prematurely old *by sin*, that he does not now run not in iniquity, not self-denial, but age has tamed down his un sanctified craving. No thanks to you *worn-out devotee of pleasure*, that he joins not now in licentious revels, that he turns a languid, listless eye, and an uninterested ear to what once delighted him. Not self-denial has taken the fire from out his eye, not the restraint of vice and principle, keeps him from the haunts of sin: 'tis that passion's indulged appetites yielded to the unhallowed fire in him fed and fanned for years, has burnt out, eating away the very desires themselves.

Do you then, in the day of health and vigor of strong cravings and outward opportunities, to you when self-denial means a struggling against the strongest sinful leanings of the soul, to you when sin is possible and pleasant, Christ is still saying, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself."

*But further*, Christian self denial has regard as well to what may not be in itself forbidden. It prescribes a restraint even on the man of honesty, of sobriety, of blameless character. I may express the idea comprehensively by saying that it implies *a complete subordination of our will and pleasure to the will and pleasure of God in Christ*.

"Christ died for all, that we which live, should not henceforth live unto ourselves, but unto him who died for us and rose again." The Christian life requires thus a complete forgetting of self. There is a very prevalent notion, that a man's chief motive should be, how to secure the greatest amount of happiness for himself. How to get through the world with the greatest ease and pleasure.

That's the motive of the *man of the world*, whatever he does, he has an eye to the return. If he invests, it's for the profit it will bring him. If he goes out of his way to help a neighbor, he is thinking of a day when he may be requiring the like. That's the motive of the *pleasure-seeker*. He is so engross-