

## Self-Renunciation

By John Angell James (1785—1859)

The apostle Paul teaches this important duty, by the following awakening and impressive appeal: "Don't you know that your body is a sanctuary of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God? **You are not your own**, for you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body." (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). What is intended in these words is, that through the vicarious sufferings and death of Christ, as an atonement to Divine justice for human transgressions—all who believe in him are freed from the curse of the law, and the dominion of sin, and are both justified and sanctified. The Christian is thus a bought man, a captive redeemed by price. It is in this sense the whole church is called the "purchased possession," Eph. 1:14. Yes, and what an idea! I repeat it—a believer is a purchased man! And at what price has he been bought! All the jewels which adorn and enrich the crown and scepter of the British monarch; with all the others that compose the regalia of all the sovereigns of the Eastern or Western world, are of no more worth in the redemption of the poorest widow in the church of God, than the dust of the street. Nothing but the blood of the Son of God could purchase a single soul.

How obvious is the inference! "You are not your own, for you were bought at a price!" How is it possible you should be your own—if you have been bought? In what sense a Christian is not his own, is explained to you by another portion of Scripture—"None of us lives to himself," Rom. 14:7. Do enter very seriously, and solemnly, and deeply, into these two impressive passages—

**"You are not your own."**

**"None of us lives to himself."**

It is for you to recollect that the renunciation of SELF, as well as of SIN, was one of the solemn transactions of that scene, and that time, when you bowed by faith at the foot of the cross, received mercy through Jesus Christ, and yielded yourselves to God. You then abjured—not only self-righteousness, but self-seeking, self-pleasing, self-living. Self, as a supreme object, was in every view of it renounced. Self, until then, had been your loftiest aim; self-love your highest affection; but then you transferred your aim and your affection to another object. The Christian has no right to ask what he will do with himself; or to what he will give himself; or how he will employ himself. He is no longer at liberty to inquire how he shall spend his energies, his time, his property, his labor, and his influence; for he is not his own, he is bought with a price.

He is not to live for **fame**—and please himself with the applause of his fellow creatures. Nor is he to live for **riches**—and please himself with increasing wealth. Nor is he to live for **health**—and please himself with the glowing energies of a sound body. Nor is he to live for **taste**—and please himself with the pursuit of literature, science, or the arts. Nor is he to live for **social enjoyment**—and please himself with an agreeable circle of friends. Nor is he to live for **ease**—and please himself with unmolested quiet. In short, he is not to consider himself as his own master to please himself supremely in any way, nor his own property to employ himself on his own account, and for his own benefit. He is not to imagine that personal gratification is to be his end and aim, for the accomplishment of which he may lay down his own schemes, select his own course, and pursue his own methods, as if he had an independent and sovereign right over himself.

Self is "the old man" to be crucified with Christ; the body of sin to be destroyed; the corrupt nature to be put away; the law in our members to be resisted; the lusts of the mind to be subdued. Self is the enemy of God to be fought against; the rival interest with Christ in our soul to be put down; the means by which the devil would hold us in alienation from holiness to be opposed. **SELF is the most subtle, the most stubborn, the most tenacious foe with which grace has to contend**, in the soul of the believer. It lives, and works, and fights, when many other corruptions are mortified. Self is the last stronghold, the very citadel of Satan in the heart, which is reduced to the obedience of faith.

Why do believers **murmur** at the painful dispensations of Providence, and find submission so hard an achievement? Because self is disturbed in its enjoyment! Why are they so easily **offended**, and experience such difficulty in showing forgiveness? Because self-esteem has been wounded! Why are they **covetous**? Because self is gratified by its increasing stores.

What is **vanity**—but the indulgence of self-love? What is **ambition**—but the exultation of self? What is **pride**—but the worship of self? Why are they so reluctant to give their time and labor for the good of others, and the glory of God? Because they want it for ease, and the enjoyment of self! Why are they peevish, quarrelsome, and discontented with the little annoyances of life, which are everywhere and continually occurring? Because they want to settle down in unmolested ease, and undisturbed quiet, to enjoy themselves!

But is this right? Is not this living as if we were our own? Is not this living for ourselves? Is not this forgetting that we are purchased property, belonging to another? My dear friends, do consider this subject. Weigh well the import of the condition of Christian discipleship, as laid down by our Lord: "If any man will come after me, LET HIM DENY HIMSELF." Self-denial, not self-pleasing, is *your* business; and the evidence of our being disciples is in exact proportion to our disposition thus to take up our cross. If we are coveting ease, quiet, soft indulgence, luxurious gratification; and are dissatisfied, and discontented, and contentious, and peevish, because we cannot please ourselves, nor get others to please us, as the supreme end of life, how can we dream that we are the disciples of Him, of whom it is declared, "he pleased not himself;" especially since it is said, "Let the same mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus?"

For whom then are we to live, and whom are we to please, if not ourselves? Who is to come in the place of self? GOD! And for this obvious reason. We are God's! God's servants! God's property!

Many of you have hired servants, both in your house and in your shops, with whom you have contracted for so much wages given to have so much work in return. To their bodily labor, to their time, in short to their whole energies of body and mind, up to the stipulated amount of work, you have therefore an undoubted and equitable right and if instead of living for you, they live for themselves; if instead of seeking to please you, they seek to please themselves; if instead of making it their aim and business to serve you, they make it their aim and business to enjoy and gratify themselves—you consider them as dishonest, and yourself defrauded of your property.

Apply this to God. You are his, not only by the right of creation, and preservation; but by the more sacred right of redemption. You, your body, soul, time, talents, property, influence—are all his—bought and paid for by the price of his Son's most precious blood. He is forever following you with his demand, and pressing it upon you. He does not allow it to lie in abeyance. He does not permit it to sleep and be forgotten, but is ever saying, "You are not your own—you are mine!" He says to you in his word, "You are mine." He bids his ministers enforce the claim every Sunday. He collects you around the sacramental table, where the symbols of the body and blood of the Lord, with silent yet impressive demand, say to you, "you are bought with a price—you are therefore not your own—you are God's."

Nor can you be at a loss in what way the claim of God is to be acknowledged and met, for this is specified: "Glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." You cannot of course add to his glory: the glowworm might as well think of adding to the effulgence of the sun. A worthless bit of tin, or glass, cannot increase the rays of the great luminary, but even these insignificant substances can 'reflect' them. So the believer, though he cannot increase the glory of Jehovah—can manifest it. God is glorified, when he is acknowledged, loved, served, imitated. The glory of God consists of his attributes, especially his moral perfections of holiness, justice, truth, love, and mercy. Hence the imitation of these in the conduct of the believer glorifies God, for these attributes in him are the same in kind as, though infinitely less in degree, than in God, and therefore they are the rays of God's glory falling upon the spirit, and reflected by him before the eyes of mankind.

The apostle, speaking of the great spiritual change wrought in the soul of a real Christian, calls it a participation of the "Divine nature," 2 Pet. 1:4. Now as God is always glorified when he is seen, the very manifestation of him being to his own praise, he is glorified by his people, because he is seen, very imperfectly I admit, but in measure, in their holy character. Hence man was said to be created in the image of God, and is now new-created in that same image, in conversion. A Christian is God's witness, image, representative in the world; and his great business is, by an imitation of God's attributes, to remind men of God; and to teach them who and what he is.

But the apostle specifies how this is to be done. "Glorify God with your **BODY**"—by all its limbs, organs, and senses—for all are his. Glorify God by chastity; by temperance; by industry in your calling; by reverence in worship; by giving up your whole frame to the service of piety and charity; and by resigning it, without murmuring, to the attacks of disease, the stroke of death, and, if called to it, to chains, imprisonment, and martyrdom for the cause of Christ. Thus even the body can be used by the soul which animates it, as an instrument for glorifying God. Even the corporeal frame, inhabited, sustained, and directed as it is, by a rational mind, may be employed to the praise and honor of its Creator. Dust though it be in its origin and destiny, it may rise to the dignity of glorifying God. From it, as an instrument of many strings, the renewed and sanctified spirit may bring out sweet music to God, such as he will accept, and be well pleased to hear. Christians, give your bodies to God, to magnify his name, and greatly honor him. Oh, do not consider them as a mere collection of organs, appetites, and senses to be gratified and pleased for their own sakes; as favorite menials to be pampered; as stately forms to be adorned, decorated, and admired; but as part of yourselves, to be yielded to God, and as members to be instruments or righteousness unto him.

The body, however, is only a part, and that the inferior part of our compound nature, with which we are to glorify God: the **SPIRIT**, the immaterial and immortal *spirit*, must also be thus employed. Our **understanding**, in the contemplation of his glory. Our **will**, in choosing him as our chief good. Our **affections**, in loving what he loves, and hating what he hates. Our **memory**, in retaining his doctrines and precepts. Our **conscience**, in directing, warning, and reproving us for him.

It is the *soul*, the immortal soul, that receives his image. Then, indeed, we glorify him, when a holy mind shines forth in all the beauties of a holy character; when there is that in us and about us, which reminds men of God; when everything about us seems to say, "Come, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together!"

We cannot be acting up to our obligations, unless we are compelling those who observe us to say, either to themselves or others, "That man, I see, fears God, and is aiming to please him. When I forget God, he reminds me of him; what I am ignorant of concerning God, he teaches me by his character; when I sin against God, his conduct rebukes me. I am afraid of him; I venerate him; and yet I do not feel easy and happy in his presence. There is something solemn about the goodness of his actions."

To produce such an impression, what unvarying sanctity, what rigid morality, what deep humility, what profound submission, what gentleness and meekness, what holy cheerfulness, what tender piety, what diffusive liberality—must there be in our conduct! Oh, what kind of people ought we to be, and must we be—to remind men of God—and give them some idea of what he is! What exemplary holiness should there be in that character, which we presume to hold up to the world, and say: "See, this is the image of God!"

Now, my dear friends, you are to glorify God. All your purposes, aims, objects, plans, wishes, and prayers, must be gathered up in that one petition, "Father, glorify your name." But does it occur to you, what a prayer that is, as presented not only *by* you, but in reference *to* you! He must have great grace, who, with a clear understanding of its meaning, can present it in sincerity. Are you then willing that God should glorify himself in you, and by you? If so, you must impose no conditions; dictate no terms; lay down no plans; make no exceptions—but leave all this to him. Such a prayer means, "Lord, **how** you will, **what** you will, **when** you will—only let me glorify you!" You must be prepared to do it, either by sickness, or health—by success, or failure in business—by settling down in ease and quiet by your fire-side, or striking your tent, and becoming a

wanderer to the ends of the earth—by the world's smile, or its frown—by the soft and silent flow of your history, or by the roaring torrent and dashing cataract—by the society, or bereavement of your friends—by a long life, or an early death.

Are you prepared for this? Will you, now that you understand it, present the prayer, "Father! glorify your name?" Can you, will you, do you put yourself in God's hand, saying, "O God, I am not my own! I am yours! Serve yourself in me, and by me. Provided you grant me grace to bear as well as do your will, I am content to do it in any situation, and any circumstances."

This is obviously your duty—for you are not your own, but God's. Think, I entreat you, of the sacred and tender obligation which comes upon you by the manner of your redemption, thus to live. How many claims are comprised in that one, "You are bought with a price!" **Justice** demands it of you, for he has purchased you, and at how immense a price! To take what belongs to man, is robbery; but to take what belongs to God, is sacrilege. **Gratitude** demands it of you. What blessedness has God conferred upon you by redeeming you! From what degradation, misery, and eternal woe, he has saved you! And to what honor, happiness, and eternal glory, he has advanced you!

**Personal interest** demands it of you. How can you be so highly honored, so happily for yourself employed—as in glorifying God? What losses would we not willingly sustain; what sufferings endure; what labor would we not willingly maintain; what self-denial would we not willingly exercise; what enjoyment would we not willingly forego; what mortification would we not willingly inflict—in order that we may glorify God?

Imagine that some unobservant, unreflecting individual, who had passed all his days without ever contemplating the glory of the sun, were, upon seeing his rays reflected from the glossy wing of some insect floating in his radiance, to turn with delighted admiration to the great luminary as the source of what he now beheld, and he were ever and always, from that time, to gaze with new pleasure and astonishment on the orb of day, what an honor would seem to have been conferred on that little creature, to have led one rational mind to an acquaintance with the most glorious of all God's works. But what is this, to the honor conferred upon a redeemed and sanctified man, a child of dust, an heir of sin, and woe, and death—so to live as to reflect from his character the rays of the Divine glory as they fall from the great Fountain of life, and light, and beauty—and thus cause eyes to see, and hearts to love, and tongues to praise Jehovah, which, in regard to his excellence, had, hitherto, been blind, and cold, and silent!

But what I now dwell upon as the strongest of all claims upon us to glorify God, is this—**LOVE** demands it. That you should glorify God, is the very end of your redemption. "Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works," Titus 2:14. "For the love of Christ constrains us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them, and rose again," 2 Cor. 5:11, 15. I do not now lead you forth to the vast field of **creation** of which you form a part, and remind you of the claim founded on the power that made you and all things. I do not place you in imagination upon the borders of the **flaming pit**, from which there is no redemption, and as the howlings of lost souls, and the smoke of their torment, ascend up forever and ever—remind you of the dreadful award of justice upon those who will *not* glorify God.

But I conduct you to **Calvary** at the hour of crucifixion, and as you gaze upon the Son of God, hanging on the cross, while the blood is flowing from his wounds, and he is exclaiming, as from the lowest depth of his agony, "My God! my God! why have you forsaken me?" I ask you what is the true meaning and design of that wondrous scene? It is Jesus Christ paying, in groans, and tears, and blood—the price of *your* redemption! It is Jesus Christ thus and forever establishing his right to your whole self, your whole life, and your whole possession. It is Jesus Christ setting down the sum of your deliverances, and ratifying his claim to your entire temporal and eternal existence!

What a robbery of God, what a felony upon heaven, is it to attempt, or even to wish to live for ourselves! Which of us can make the daring attempt, or cherish the unjust, ungrateful wish? And yet how prone are we to this! How much of this wicked sacrilege is going on! How many professors, in opposition to claims so sacred, so tender, and so strong—are living for their own ease, enjoyment, and aggrandizement! How few do we see who seem to be sensible of the claims of the Lord Jesus Christ! How few, who enter as they should do into that admonition, "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do—do all to the glory of God!" How few, who connect the glory of God with the whole course of their conduct, as the end of every action, the ultimate object of all they do! How few, to whom it is matter of plan, forethought, purpose, and calculation—to lay out themselves to be holy, useful, and successful in leading others to think upon God, and inquire after him!

What laborious exertion, and constant scheming, and ingenious contrivances after wealth, do we behold! What aspirations after that which is elegant, fashionable, and genteel! What consultations and calculations about ease, comfort, and enjoyment! How intent are parents to amass wealth for their children, to form advantageous connections for them, often without due regard to their spiritual and eternal welfare! And when, through the good providence of God, tradesmen have been successful in business, and are about to retire upon their means, how solicitous are they to select a pleasant locality, a respectable community, a popular minister—instead of a situation where they might do good, and strengthen the hands of some faithful preacher of the word laboring amidst great discouragement! Alas, how applicable are the words of the apostle to the present generation, "They all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ!"

My dear friends, study afresh your obligations. Rise each morning, designing to glorify God by all the varying circumstances of the day; and each night, as you lay your head upon your pillow, ask the question, "Have I glorified God today?" Enter every new situation—meet every new trial—engage in every new effort, saying, Father, help me to glorify you!" Consider every place a scene for this duty—the shop, the house, the market; as well as the house of God. When sinking down from this high purpose, and you are in danger of becoming self-indulgent, worldly-minded, and intent upon ease and gratification—cast a look at the cross, and listen to the reproving words which come from it: "You are not your own!"

Act so as to give sincerity, meaning, and emphasis to an expression, the truth and reality of which have been questioned by the ignorant and profane, and the whole resolved into cant and hypocrisy; I mean, the phrase, "*glorifying God.*" How has this sublime expression been abused; to what low and selfish, secular and sectarian ends has it been prostituted; how has it been employed to sanction deeds, and to cover motives, which the Scripture condemns, and the mind of God abhors! Rescue it from degradation; roll away from it reproach; and convince those who never utter it but with a sneer and a taunt, that amidst many to whom it is mere religious verbiage, there are some who feel the claim of redeeming mercy, and who, by a life of obedience to the word of God, and conformity to his image, are seeking to glorify their Father who is heaven; and who, sensible of their utter insufficiency of themselves for a work so difficult and so high—are engaged in fervent, constant, and believing prayer for the necessary aid of the Holy Spirit.