

This is detailed, definitive explanation of the fallacy of many different forms of Self-Reliance by an Oxford Group investigative journalist converted to Oxford Group member

(ABSOLUTE) UNSELFISHNESS

From: 1932 For Sinners Only – Chapter 22: What Is Sin?

By

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Finally, let us take the difference between ourselves and Christ as regards our conduct, our attitudes, manner, judgments and feelings towards others. **Self** – Let us make a list of the different forms in which **self** operates in our lives. Archbishop Temple has said, "Your problems are mixed up with the things you love most and which count most to you." **Self-love** shows itself in the love of praise and popularity and social success. Often we stand on what we are pleased to call our dignity. In fact, our dignity is so well stood on that there's really not much left. We dread almost more than anything to make a fool of ourselves. We develop what we are pleased to call sensitiveness, but which we can better call touchiness. Then **self-pity** creeps in. We feel inferior, we positively hug failure and point to previous defeats as evidence of our limitations. Or we may develop a martyr complex with all its false heroics. We say we "can stand anything." The truth is we may stand anything, but we don't change anything. Then **self-importance** often gives rise to jealousy and makes us run on our position and reputation, though inwardly defeated. We develop "**self-respect**." That usually means ninety per cent, self and ten per cent, respect. We ask for special treatment like Naaman the Syrian, or we enjoy being interesting invalids. But the times are so urgent that there is no place for the interesting invalid in the front-line trench. He ought to be shot at dawn.

Again, **self-interest** about money or possessions shows itself by being unwilling to lend them or give them, being fussy about them, spending too much time thinking about them, suffering from an exaggerated carefulness about our own things. It makes us preoccupied and worried with our own affairs. We become penny wise and pound foolish. We painstakingly practice "the economy that leads to poverty." We only believe in Matthew vi. 33 so long as the stock market is sound. This constant **self-interest** leads to nerves and irritation. How often is the root cause of nerves just sin!

Another form of **self-seeking** is the ambition that disregards the interest of others and is not over-scrupulous about its methods of obtaining its objects. The prophet replies with direct simplicity, "Seek you great things for yourself; seek them not."

Self-consciousness reveals a life and habits of mind that are still rotating around the axis ego. In most of us there is the instinct for **self-display** showing itself in love of attention and in the willingness to do our best as first string, but not being ready for the same effort when less credit will come our way. Such **self-consciousness** often appears in clothes and manners and in the subjects of our conversation.

One of the commonest forms of self is **self-indulgence**. There is **self-indulgence** in food and physical comforts. But we also indulge it when we are lazy, or we procrastinate, and are unpunctual. We say we'll put off until to-morrow the thing we can do the day after. Some things we do in the sweet by-and-by which need to be done in the nasty now and now. We indulge ourselves by airing our prejudices about people, airing our likes and dislikes in matters of books, food, furniture, and furnishings generally; and we are tremendously taken up with whether a thing or a person appeals to us or not. We often regulate our behavior accordingly, and have no hesitation in even being rude to people we may not like or whom we consider socially inferior. Often we give way to moods when we become, as a lady said of her debutante daughter, expensive to keep and difficult to live with. Some of us are extravagant in money, sentimental about our friends, whether of the other sex or the same sex, and vindictive when we are crossed.

Then, again, there is **self-centeredness**. Most of us are born rotating on the axis ego, and continue to do so until the end of our lives, often at an increasing rate. One result of that is that we are never able to keep friends for any length of time. It not only loses us friends, but often keeps us from bothering to make them. A girl once told us she had a private cinematograph tucked away in the back of her head, and that when her mind was not otherwise occupied she would set the film in motion and delight to watch scene follow scene, now romantic, now tragic, now pathetic, now sentimental, now heroic, in each and all of which she herself was the central figure. It finally culminated in the imaginary scene in which her own deepest desires were fully gratified with curtains and sofa covers of the right colour and the husband with hair to match. All of us have our day-dreams in one form, or another. Though not necessarily wrong in themselves, so far as they are centered in **self-interest** they are wrong.

And now for one of the biggest monsters of the **self, self-will**. We simply want our own way, and will not yield. The results of it are as obvious as they are disastrous. It brings friction with others and tiredness for ourselves. It is one form of pride. We do no team-work, we cannot fit in. We learn no diagnosis, and are consequently useless to the people and the situations around us. With our **self-will** unchecked we become precipitate in action, unguided in decisions, demanding in our efforts and impatient of restraint or advice.

It is the most prolific source of quarrels in families. The objects obtained are always unsatisfying, and the result is that we crave more indulgence in the vain hope of more satisfaction. The final indictment against self-will is written by the prophet, "We have turned everyone to his own way." It is also, if we only knew it, incredibly stupid. We often mistake obstinacy for strength of mind.

It is extraordinary how prolific our minds are in finding reasons for our own failures which we endeavour to make satisfactory to ourselves and, if possible, to others. It is the well-known art, self-justification. When corrected, we seek to justify. And with that dislike of correction in ourselves goes a love of correcting others. Nothing alienates the hearts of people more quickly than that.

Then there is the very common business of being self-opinionated. We do love our own opinion about a thing. We are very ready to assert it. We are confident it is right. We resent disagreement, even though we may know little about the subject. It makes us seek to impose our point of view, instead of sharing a quality of life. And there is the sin of the pet point of view. We allow ourselves to be so much absorbed by our own that we never see anyone's else. It is like Nero fiddling a little tune of his own while the horror of a burning Rome is all around him.

Again, there is self-sufficiency, which makes us feel no need of other help. This results from too small a conception of Christ and His demands, and too large a conception of our own capacities.

The last self we will deal with is the final atheism of self-effort. We do God's work, but not His will. It is our choice, in our way, on our strength. It leads immediately to a false objective, in self-chosen service. We do not God's best, but a good of our own. The results which ought to accompany the working of the Holy Spirit are manifestly absent. We are all the more eager, therefore, to achieve success in the objects we ourselves have chosen. That, again, leads to a false activity to cover up an inward sense of dissatisfaction, futility and frustration, which haunts all of us at times, when our lives are run on self-effort.

This same self-effort makes us "Divided Personalities." One Church-worker before she met the Group had two distinct sets of friends the officially religious people and her unofficial Pagan friends. There was no question in her mind which set appealed to her the more. We can run an organization on self-effort, but so can the devil. We don't change lives ; the devil does. And an awful coldness settles on a church or any religious body when it is run as an organization. A minister told us that he felt each Sunday as if he were performing a solo on a spiritual ice-rink.

On the basis of self-effort we begin to departmentalize. We say, "My job is so and so. It is somebody else's job to change lives." That distinction is thoroughly false. Either we have

measles or we haven't! If we have measles, we give it away to everybody; if we haven't, nobody will get it.

Finally, **self-effort** makes us take refuge in a fool-proof theology. We develop a point of view instead of living a quality of life. This draws us on to preach things which are beyond our experience, and are therefore unreal or even distasteful. We become wooden and rigid and falsely pious. We develop a false sense of duty, and live in the grip of secondary things, instead of being at the command of other people. We begin to run on principle and technique, and not on the Holy Spirit's guidance. Our prayer-life is spasmodic. We do the jobs within the reach of our capacity, and only think of asking God's help when the limit of our capacity has been reached. We use God like the Fire Brigade, and only call Him in in a crisis. We ask Him to control only part of

our lives, instead of being Lord and Master of all.

These are some of the world's alternatives to a Christ-centered and Christ-controlled life. Let us recognize in these sins what we really seek. We seek compensation for our defeat and for our lack of Christ. We take to substitutes for power. We need anodynes to stop the pain and discomfort, and to help us forget. We play with alternatives to facing Christ. We adopt camouflage to cover up our defeats and to hide from one another.

"Oh, wad some power the gifts give us,

To see ourselves as others see us!"