

# The Sinfulness of Flesh-Pleasing

by Richard Baxter

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## Ch 01 Flesh-Pleasing is a Sin

How far flesh-pleasing is a sin, I shall distinctly open to you in these propositions:

1. The pleasing or displeasing of the sensitive appetite in itself considered, is neither sin nor duty, good nor evil, but as commanded or forbidden by some law of God, which is not absolutely done.
2. To please the flesh by things forbidden is undoubtedly a sin, and so it is to displease it too. Therefore this is not all that is here meant, that the matter that pleaseth it must not be things forbidden.
3. To overvalue the pleasing of the flesh is a sin and to prefer it before the pleasing of God, and the holy preparations for heaven, is the state of carnality and ungodliness, and the common cause of the damnation of souls. The delight of the flesh or senses is a natural good; and the natural desire of it in itself (as is said) is neither vice nor virtue: but when this little natural good is preferred before the greater spiritual, moral, or eternal good, this is the sin of carnal minds, which is threatened with death, Romans viii. 1, 5-8, 13.

4. To buy the pleasing of the flesh at too dear a rate, as the loss of time, or with care and trouble above its worth, and to be too much set on making provisions to please it, doth show that it is overvalued, and is the sin forbidden, Rom. xiii. 14.

5. When any desire of the flesh is inordinate, immoderate, or irregular for matter, or manner, quantity, quality, or season, it is a sin to please that Inordinate desire.

6. When pleasing the flesh doth too much pamper it, and cherish filthy lusts, or any other sin, and is not necessary on some other account, as doing greater good, it is a sin. But if life require it, lust must be subdued by other means.

7. When pleasing the flesh doth hurt it, by impairing health, and so making the body less fit for duty, it is a sin. And so almost all intemperance tendeth to breed diseases; and God commandeth temperance even for the body's good.

8. When unnecessary flesh-pleasing hindereth any duty of piety, justice, charity, or self-preservation, in thought, affection, word, or deed, it is sinful.

9. If any pleasing of the flesh can be imagined to have no tendency directly or indirectly to any moral good or evil, it is not the object of a moral choosing or refusing; but like the winking of the eye, which falls not under deliberation, it is not within the compass of morality.

10. Every pleasing of the flesh, which is capable of being referred to a higher end, and is not so referred and used, is a sin. And there is scarce any thing, which is eligible, which a vacant, waking man should deliberate on, but should be referred to a higher end; even to the glory of God, and our salvation by cheering us up to love and thankfulness, and strengthening or fitting us some way for some duty. This is apparently a sin,

(1.) Because else flesh-pleasing is made our ultimate end, and the flesh an idol if ever we desire it only for itself (when it may be referred to a higher end). For though the sensitive appetite of itself hath no intended end, yet whatsoever the will desireth is either as an end, or as a means. That which is not desired as a means to some higher end, is desired as our ultimate end itself (in that act). But God only is man's lawful, ultimate end.

(2.) Because it is against an express command, I Cor. x.31, "Whether ye eat, or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

(3.) Because else we shall take God's creatures in vain, and cast them away in waste.

(4.) And we shall lose our own benefit to which the creature or pleasure should be improved.

(5.) And we shall silence reason, when it should direct; and we shall suspend the government of the will, and give the government (so long) to the flesh or brutish appetite: for that faculty ruleth, whose object is our end. These reasons clearly prove it a sin to terminate our desires in any act of flesh-pleasing as our end, and look no higher, when it is a matter of moral choice and deliberation.

11. But the sin here is not simply that the flesh is pleased, but that the duty of referring it to a higher end is omitted: so that it is a sin of omission (unless we proceed to refer better things as a means to it).

12. The intending of God's glory or our spiritual good, cannot be distinctly and sensibly re-acted in every particular pleasure we take, or bit we eat, or thing we use; but a sincere, habitual intention well laid at first in the heart, will serve to the right use of many particular means. As a man purposeth at his first setting out to what place he meaneth to go, and afterward goeth on, though at every step he think not sensibly of his end; so he that devoteth himself unto God, and in general designeth all to his glory, and the furtherance of his duty and salvation, will carry on small particulars to that end, by a secret, unobserved action of the soul, performed at the same time with other actions, which only are observed. He that intendeth but his health in eating and drinking, is not remembering his health at every bit and cup; and yet hath such a habit of care and caution, as will unobservedly keep him in his way, and help him to fit the means unto the end. As the accustomed hand of a musician can play a lesson on his lute, while he thinks of something else, so can a resolved Christian faithfully do such accustomed things as eating, and drinking, and clothing him, and labouring in his calling, to the good ends which he (first actually, and still habitually) resolved on, without a distinct remembrance and observable intention of that end.

13. The body must be kept in that condition (as far as we can) that is fittest for the service of the soul: as you keep your horse, neither so pampered as to be unruly, nor yet so low as to disable him for travel; but all that health and strength which makes it not unruly, maketh it the more serviceable. It is not the life of the body, but the health and the cheerfulness, which maketh it fit for duty. And so much pleasing of the flesh as tendeth but to its health and cheerfulness, is a duty, where it can be done without greater hurt the other way. A heavy body is but a dull and heavy servant to the mind, yea, a great impediment to the soul in duty, and a great temptation to many sins; as sickly and melancholy persons, and many dull and phlegmatic people, know by sad experience. It is as great a duty to help the body to its due alacrity and fitness for service, as it is to tame it, and bring it under by fasting and sackcloth, when it is proud or lustful. And they that think fasting on certain days, in a formal manner, is acceptable to God, when the state of the body is not helped, but rather hurt and hindered by it, as if it were a thing required for itself, do mistakingly offer a sacrifice to God, which he requireth not; and take him to be an enemy to man, that desireth his pain and grief, when it tendeth not to his good. A mower that hath a good scythe will do more in a day, than another that hath a bad one can do in two: every workman knoweth the benefit of having his tools in order; and every traveller knows the difference between a cheerful and a tired horse; and they that have tried health and sickness, know what a help it is in every work of God, to have a healthful body, and cheerful spirits, and an alacrity and promptitude to obey the mind. When the sights of prospects and beauteous buildings, and fields, and countries, or the use of walks, or gardens, do tend to raise the soul to holy contemplation, to admire the Creator, and to think of the glory of the life to come (as Bernard used his pleasant walks); this delight is lawful if not a duty, where it may be had. So when music doth cheer the mind, and fit it for thanks and praise to God: and when the rest of the body, and the use of your best apparel, and moderate feasting, on the Lord's day, and other days of thanksgiving, do promote the spiritual service of the day, they are good and profitable; but to those that are more hindered by fulness, even abstinence on such days is best. So that the use of the body must

be judged of as it is a means or an expression of the good or evil of the mind.

14. Sometimes the present time must be most regarded herein, and sometimes the future. For when some great sin, or judgment, or other reason calls us to a fast, when it becomes needful to the ends of that present day, we must do it, though the body were so weak that it would be somewhat the worse afterward; so be it that the good which we may expect by it that day, be greater than the good which it is like to deprive us of afterward otherwise the after-loss, if greater, is more to be avoided.

15. Many things do remotely fit us for our main end, which, nearly and directly, seem to have no tendency to it; as those that are only to furnish us with natural strength, and vigour, and alacrity, or to prevent impediments. As a traveller's hood and cloak, and other carriage, seem rather to be hindrances to his speed; but yet are necessary for preventing the cold and wet, which else might hinder him more. Yea, a possible, uncertain danger or impediment, if great, may be prevented with a certain small impediment. So it is meet that our bodies be kept in that health and alacrity, which is ordinarily necessary to our duty; and in eating and drinking, and lawful recreations, it is not only the next or present duty, which we prepare for, but for the duty which may be very distant.

16. Ordinarily it is safest to be more fearful of excess of fleshly pleasure, than of defect. For ordinarily we are all very prone to an excess, and also the excess is usually more dangerous. When excess is the damnation of all, or most that ever perish, and defect is but the trouble and hinderance but never, or rarely, the damnation of any, it is easy then to see on which side we should be most fearful, cautious, and vigilant

17. Yet excessive scrupulousness maybe a greater sin, and a greater hindrance in the work of God, than some small excesses of flesh-pleasing, which are committed through ignorance or inadvertency. When an honest heart which preferreth God before the flesh, and is willing to please him though it displease the flesh, shall yet mistake in some small particulars, or commit some daily errors of infirmity or heedlessness, it is a far less hinderance to the main work of religion, than if that man should daily perplex his mind with scruples about every bit he eats, whether it be not too pleasing or too much, and about every v. word he speaks, and every step he goes, as many poor, tempted, melancholy persons do; thereby disabling themselves, not only to love, and praise, and thankfulness, but even all considerable service

## **Ch 02 Lawful Pleasing of the Senses**

In sum, All pleasing of the senses or flesh, which is lawful, must have these qualifications:

1. God's glory must be the ultimate end.
2. The matter must be lawful and not forbidden.
3. Therefore it must not be to the hinderance of duty.

4. Nor to the drawing of us to sin.

5. Nor to the hurt of our health.

6. Nor too highly valued, nor too dearly bought.

7. The measure must be moderate rate. Where any of these are wanting, it is sin: and where flesh-pleasing is habitually in the bent of heart and life preferred before the pleasing of God, it proves the soul in captivity to the flesh, and in a damnable condition.

How Great is the Evil of Flesh-Pleasing!

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Objection #1: It Doesn't Harm Anybody

III. I am next to show you the evil or malignity of predominant flesh-pleasing: for if the greatness of the sin were known, it would contribute much to the cure. And, 1. Understand that it is the sin of sins the end of all sin, and therefore the very sum and life of all. All the evil wicked men commit, is ultimately to please the flesh: the love of flesh-pleasing is the cause of all. Pride, and covetousness, and whoredom, and wantonness, and gluttony, and drunkenness is, and all the rest, are but either the immediate works of sensuality and flesh-pleasing, or the distant service of it, by laying in provision for it. And all the malicious enmity and opposition to God and godliness is from hence, because they cross the interest and desires of the flesh: the final cause is it for which men invent and use all the means that tend to it. Therefore all other sin being nothing but the means for the pleasing of our fleshly appetites and fancies, it is evident that flesh-pleasing is the common cause of them all, and is to all other sin as the spring is to the watch, or the poise to the clock; the weight which giveth them all their motion. Cure this sin and you have taken off the poise, and cured all the positive sins of the soul: though the privative sins would be still uncured, if there were no more done; because that which makes the clock stand still, is not enough to make it go right. But, indeed, nothing but the love of pleasing God, can truly cure the love of flesh-pleasing: and such a cure is the cure of every sin, both positive and privative, active and defective.

2. Flesh-pleasing is the grand idolatry of the world; and the flesh the greatest idol that ever was set up against God. Therefore Paul saith of sensual worldlings, that "their belly is their god," and thence it is that they "mind earthly things," and "glory in their shame, and are enemies to the cross of Christ," that is, to sufferings for Christ, and the doctrine and duties which would cause their sufferings. That is a man's god which he taketh for his chief good, and loveth best, and trusteth in most, and is most desirous to please: and this is the flesh to every sensualist. He "loveth pleasure more than God," 2 Tim. iii. 2, 4. He "savoureth" or "mindeth" the "things of the flesh," and "liveth" to it, and "walketh after it," Rom. viii. 1, 5-8, 13. He "maketh provision for it to satisfy its appetite or lusts," Rom. xiii. 14. He "soweth to the flesh," Gal. vi. 8, and fulfilleth his lust, when it "lusteth against the Spirit," Gal. v. 16, 17. And thus, while concupiscence or sensuality hath dominion, sin is said to have dominion over them, and they are servants to it, Rom. vi. 14, 20. For "to whom men yield themselves servants to obey, his servants they are whom they serve or obey," Rom. vi. 16. It

is not bowing the knee and praying to another, that is the chief idolatry. As loving, and pleasing, and obeying, and trusting, and seeking, and delighting in him, are the chiefest parts of the service of God, which he preferreth before a thousand sacrifices or compliments; so loving the flesh, and pleasing it, and obeying it, and trusting in it, and seeking and delighting in its pleasures, are the chief service of the flesh; and more than if you offered sacrifice to it, and therefore is the grand idolatry. And so the flesh is the chief enemy of God, which hath the chiefest love and service which are due to him, and robs him of the hearts of all mankind that are carnal and unsanctified. All the Baals, and Jupiters, and Apollos, and other idols of the world set together, have not so much of the love and service due to God, as the flesh alone hath. If other things be idolized by the sensualist, it is but as they subserve his flesh, and therefore they are made but inferior idols. He may idolize his wealth, and idolize men in power and worldly greatness; but it is but as they can help or hurt his flesh: this hath his heart. By the interest of the flesh, he judgeth of his condition; by this he judgeth of his friends; by this he chooseth his actions or refuseth them, and by this he measureth the words and actions of all others. He takes all for good which pleaseth his flesh, and all for bad that is against his pleasure.

3. The flesh is not only the common idol, but the most devouring idol in all the world. It hath not, as subservient, flattered idols have, only a knee and compliment, or now and then a sacrifice or ceremony, but it hath the heart, the tongue, the body to serve it; the whole estate, the service of friends, the use of wit and utmost diligence; in a word, it hath all. It is loved and served by the sensualist, as God should be loved and served by his own, even "with all the heart, and soul, and might:" they "honour it with their substance, and the firstfruits of their increase." It is as faithfully served as Christ requireth to be of his disciples: men will part with father, and mother, and brother, and sister, and nearest friends, and all that is against it, for the pleasing of their flesh. Nay, Christ required men to part with no greater matter for him than transitory earthly things, which they must shortly part with whether they will or no; but they do for the flesh ten thousand thousandfold more than ever they were required to do for Christ. They forsake God for it. They forsake Christ, and heaven, and their salvation for it. They forsake all the solid comforts of this life, and all the joys of the life to come for it. They sell all that they have, and lay down the price at its feet; yea, more than all they have, even all their hopes of what they might have to all eternity. They suffer a martyrdom in the flames of hell for ever, for their flesh. All the pains they take is for it. All the wrong they do to others, and all the stirs and rums they make in the world, is for it. And all the time they spend is for it: and had they a thousand years more to live, they would spend it accordingly. If any thing seem excepted for God, it is but the bones, or crumbs, or leavings of the flesh; or rather, it is nothing: for God hath not indeed the hours which he seems to have, he hath but a few fair words and compliments, when the flesh hath their hearts in the midst of their hypocritical worship, and on his holy day; and they serve him but as the Indians serve the devil, that he may serve their turns, and do them no hurt.

4. How base an idol is the flesh! If all the derision used by Elijah and the prophets against the heathenish idolatry be due, is not as much due against the idolatry of all the sensual? Is it so great a madness to serve an idol of silver, or gold or stone, or wood? what better is it to serve an idol of flesh and blood; a paunch of guts; that is full of filth and excrements within, and the skin itself, the cleanest part, is ashamed to be uncovered? We may say to the carnal worldling, as Elijah to the Baalists, and more; "Call upon your God in the hour of your distress: cry aloud, perhaps he is asleep, or he is blowing his nose, or vomiting, or

purging: certainly he will be shortly rotting in the grave, more loathsome than the dirt or dung upon the earth." And is this a god to sacrifice all that we can get to? and to give all our time, and care, and labour, and our souls and all to? O judge of this idolatry, as God will make you judge at last!

5. And here next consider how impious and horrid an abasement it is of the eternal God, to prefer so vile a thing before him! And whether every ungodly, sensual man, be not a constant, practical blasphemer? What cost thou but say continually by thy practice, This dunghill, nasty flesh, is to be preferred before God, to be more loved, and obeyed, and served? It deserveth more of my time than he: It is more worthy of my delight and love. God will be judge, (and judge in righteousness ere long,) whether this be not the daily language of thy life, though thy tongue be taught some better manners. And whether this be blasphemy, judge thyself. Whether thou judge God or the flesh more worthy to be pleased, and which thou thinkest it better to please, ask thy own heart, when cards, and dice, and eating, and drinking, and gallantry, and idleness, and greatness, and abundance, do all seem so sweet unto thee, in comparison of thy thoughts of God, and his holy word and service! and when morning and night, and whenever thou art alone, those thoughts can run out with unweariedness or pleasure, upon these provisions for thy flesh, which thou canst hardly force to look up unto God, a quarter of an hour, though with unwillingness.

6. Think also what a contempt of heaven it is, to prefer the pleasing of the flesh before it. There are but two ends which all men aim at; the pleasing of the flesh on earth, or the enjoying of God in heaven a sensual life hereafter too, as well as here). And these two stand one against the other. And he that sets up one, doth renounce (or as good as renounce) the other. "If ye sow to the flesh, of the flesh ye shall reap corruption; but if ye sow to the Spirit, of the Spirit ye shall reap everlasting life," Gal. vi. 8. Your wealth, and honour, and sports, and pleasures, and appetites are put in the scales against heaven, and all the joys and hopes hereafter, (to say you hope to have them both, is the cheat of infidelity, that believes not God; and is not heaven most basely esteemed of by those that prefer so base a thing before it?

7. Remember that flesh-pleasing is a great contempt and treachery against the soul. It is a great contempt of an immortal soul, to prefer its corruptible flesh before it, and to make its servant to become its master, and to ride on horseback, while it goes, as it were, on foot. Is the flesh worthy of so much time, and cost, and care, and so much ado as is made for it in the world, and is not a never-dying soul worth more? Nay, it is a betraying of the soul: you set up its enemy before it; and put its safety into an enemy's hands; and you cast away all its joys and hopes for the gratifying of the flesh. Might it not complain of your cruelty, and say, Must my endless happiness be sold to purchase so short a pleasure for your flesh? Must I be undone for ever, and lie in hell, that it may be satisfied for a little time? But why do I speak of the soul's complaint? Alas! it is itself that it must complain! For it is its own doing! It hath its choice: the flesh can but tempt it, and not constrain it: God hath put the chief power and government into its hands, if it will sell its own eternal hopes, to pamper worm's meat, it must act accordingly. You would not think very honourably of that man's intelligence or honesty, who would sell the patrimony of all his children, and all his friends that trusted him therewith, and after sell their persons into slavery, and all this to purchase him a delicious feast, with sports and entertainment for a day! And is he wiser or better that selleth (in effect) the inheritance of his soul, and betrayeth it to hell and devils for

ever, and all is to purchase the fleshly pleasure of so short a life?

8. Remember what a beastly life it is to be a sensualist It is an unmaning of yourselves. Sensual pleasures are brutish pleasures; beasts have then well as men. We have the higher faculty of reason, to subdue and rule the beastly part. And reason is the man; and hath a higher kind of felicity to delight in. Do you think that man is made for no higher matters than a beast? And that you the not a more noble object for your delight than you swine or dog hath, who have the pleasure of meal and lust, and play, and ease, and fancy, as well a you?? Certainly where sensual pleasures are preferred before the higher pleasures of the soul, the an becomes a beast, or worse, subjecting his reason to his brutish part.

9. Think what an inconsiderable, pitiful felicity it is that fleshly persons choose; how small an hors, as well as sordid. Oh how quickly will the game be ended, and the delights of boiling lust be gone ! How quickly will the drink be past the throats, and their delicate dishes be turned into filth! How short is the sport and laughter of the fool! And how quickly will that face be the index of a pained body, or a grieved, self-tormenting mind! It is but a few days till all their stately greatness will be levelled; and the most adorned, pampered flesh w ill have no more to show of all the pleasure which was so dearly bought, than a Lazarus, or the most mortified saint. A few days will turn their pleasure into anguish, and their jollity into groans, and their ostentation into lamentation, and all their glory into shame. As every moment puts an end to all the pleasures of their lives that are past, and they are now to them as if they had never been; so the last moment is at hand, which will end the little that remains. And then the sinner will with groans confess, that he hath made a miserable choice, and that he might have had a more durable pleasure if he had been wise. When the skull is cast up with the spade, to make room for a successor, you may see the hole where all the meat and drink went in, and the hideous seat of that face, which sometime was the discovery of wantonness, pride, and scorn; but you will see no signs of mirth or pleasure.

10. Lastly, consider that there is scarce a sin in the world more unexcusable than this. The flesh-pleaser seeth the end of all his sensual delights, in the faces of the sick, and in the corpses that are daily carried to the earth, and in the graves, and bones, and dust of those that sometime had as merry a life as he. His reason can say, All this is gone with them and is as if it had never been, and so it will shortly be with me. He knoweth that all the pleasure of his life past is now of no value to himself. His warnings are constant, close, and sensible; and therefore he hath the greater sin.

## **Ch 03 Objection #1: It Doesn't Harm Anybody**

IV. Objection 1. What hurt is it to God, or any one else, that I please my flesh? I will not believe that a thing so harmless will displease him. Answer: Merely as it is pleasure, it hath no hurt in it: but as it is inordinate or immoderate pleasure; or as it is over-loved, and preffered before God and your salvation; or as it is greater than your delight in God; or as it wants its proper end, and is loved merely for itself, and not used as a means to higher things, and as it is made a hinderance to the soul, and to spiritual pleasure, and the service

of God; and as it is the brutish delight of an ungoverned, rebellious appetite, that mastereth reason, and is not under obedience to God. Though sin can do God no hurt, it can do you hurt, and it can do him wrong. I think I have showed you what hurt and poison is in it already. It is the very rebellion of corrupted nature; the turning of all things upside down; the taking down God, and heaven, and reason, and destroying the use of all the creatures, and setting up flesh-pleasing instead of all, and making a brute your god and governor. And do you ask what harm there is in this? So will your child do, when he desireth any play, or pleasure; and the sick, when they desire to please their appetite. But your father, and physician, and reason, and not brutish appetite, must be judge.

## **Ch 04 Objection #2: It's My Nature to Be This Way.**

Objection II. But I feel it is natural to me, and therefore can be no sin. Answer: 1. The inordinate violent, unruly appetite is no otherwise natural to you, than as a leprosy is to a leprous generation. And will you love your disease, because it is natural? It is no otherwise natural, than it is to be malicious, and revengeful, and to disobey your governors, and abuse your neighbours; and yet I think they will not judge you innocent, for rebellion or abuse, because it is natural to you. 2. Though the appetite be natural, is not reason to rule it as natural to you? And is not the subjection of the appetite to reason natural? If it be not, you have lost the nature of man, and are metamorphosed into the nature of a beast. God gave you a higher nature to govern your appetite and lower nature: and though reason cannot take away your appetite, it can rule it, and keep you from fulfilling it, in any thing or measure that is unfitting.

## **Ch 05 Objection #3: God Made My Desires, So They Cannot Be Sinful**

Objection III. But it appeareth by the case of Eve, that the appetite was the same in innocency, therefore it is no sin. Answer: You must not forget the difference between, 1. The appetite itself. 2. The violence and unruly disposition of the appetite. 3. And the actual obeying and pleasing of the appetite. The first (the appetite itself) was in innocency, and is yet no sin. But the other two (the violence of it, and the obeying it) were not in innocency, and are both sinful.

## **Ch 06 Objection #4: God Made Me This Way, So Why Shouldn't I Follow My Desires?**

Objection IV. But why would God give innocent man an appetite that must be crossed by reason? and that desired that which reason must forbid? Answer: The sensitive nature is in order of generation before the rational: and reason and God's laws do not make sense to be no sense. You may as well ask, why God would make beasts, which must be restrained and ruled by men; and therefore have a desire to that which man must restrain them from? You do but ask, Why God made us men and not angels? Why he placed our souls in flesh? He oweth you no account of his creation. But you may see it is meet that obedience should have some trial by difficulties and opposition, before it have its commendation and reward. He gave you a body that was subject to the soul, as the horse unto the rider. and you should admire his wisdom, and thank him for the governing power of reason; and not murmur at him, because the horse will not go as well without the guidance of the rider, or because he maketh you not able to go as fast and as well on foot. So much for the sensualist's objections.

## Ch 07 Ten Marks of A Flesh-Pleaser

V. The signs of a flesh-pleaser or sensualist are these (which may be gathered from what is said already):

1. When a man in desire to please his appetite, referreth it not (actually or habitually) to a higher end, viz. the fitting himself to the service of God; but sticketh only in the delight.
2. When he looks more desirously and industriously after the prosperity of his body than of his soul.
3. When he will not part with or forbear his pleasures, when God forbiddeth them, or when they hurt his soul, or when the necessities of his soul do call him more loudly another way, but he must have his delight whatever it cost him, and is so set upon it, that he cannot deny it to himself.
4. When the pleasures of his flesh exceed his delights in God, and his holy word and ways, and the forethoughts of endless pleasure; and this not only in the passion, but in the estimation, choice, and prosecution. When he had rather be at a play, or feast, or gaming, or getting good bargains or profits in the world, than to live in the life of faith, and love, a holy and heavenly conversation.
5. When men set their minds to contrive and study to make provision for the pleasures of the flesh; and this is first and sweetest in their thoughts.
6. When they had rather talk, or hear, or read of fleshly pleasures, than of spiritual and heavenly delights.
7. When they love the company of merry sensualists, better than the communion of saints, in which they may be exercised in the praises of their Maker.

8. When they account that the best calling, and condition and place for them to live in, where they have the pleasure of the flesh, where they have ease, and fare well, and want nothing for the body, rather than that where they have far better help and provision for the soul, though the flesh be pinched for it.

9. When he will be at more cost to please his flesh than to please God.

10. When he will believe or like no doctrine but libertinism, and hateth mortification as too strict preciseness. By these, and such other signs, sensuality may easily be known; yea, by the main bent of the life.

## Ch 08 Five Ways People Delude Themselves

VI. Many flesh-pleasers flatter themselves with better titles, being deceived by such means as these:

1. Because they are against the doctrine of libertinism, and hold as strict opinions as any. But flesh-pleasing may stand with the doctrine of mortification, and the strictest opinions, as long as they are not put in practice.

2. Because they live not in any gross, disgraced vice. They go not to stage-plays, or unseasonably to alehouses or taverns; they are not drunken, nor gamesters, nor spend their hours in unnecessary recreations or pastimes; they are no fornicators, nor wallow in wealth. But the flesh may be pleased and served in a way that hath no disgrace accompanying it in the world. May not a man make his ease, or his prosperity, or the pleasing of his appetite, without any infamous excesses, to be as much his felicity and highest end, and that which practically he taketh for his best, as well as if he did it in a shameful way? Is not many a man a gluttonous flesh-pleaser, that maketh his delight the highest end of all his eating and drinking; and pleaseth his appetite without any restraint, but what his health and reputation put upon him, though he eat not till he vomit or be sick? Even the flesh itself may forbid a sensualist to be drunk, or to eat till he be sick; for sickness and shame are displeasing to the flesh. Many a man covereth a life of sensuality, not only with a seeming temperance, unreproved of men, but also with a seeming strictness and austerity. But conscience might tell them, where they have their good things, Luke xvi. 25.

3. Some think they are no sensual flesh-pleasers, because they live in constant misery, in poverty and want, labouring hard for their daily bread; and therefore they hope that they are the Lazaruses that have their sufferings here. But is not all this against thy will? Wouldst thou not fare as well as the rich, and live as idly, and take thy pleasure, if thou hadst as much as they? What thou wouldst do, that thou cost in God's account. It is thy will that thou shalt be judged by. A thief doth not become an honest man when the prison or stocks do hinder him from stealing, but when a changed heart doth hinder him.

4. Others think that they are no flesh-pleasers, because their wealth and places, and

degrees of honour allow them to live high in diet and delights. It is like the rich man, Luke xvi. who was "clothed with purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day "did live upon his own, and as he thought agreeably to his rank and place; and the fool, Luke xii. 19, 20, that said, " Soul, take shine ease, eat, drink, and be merry," did intend to please himself but with his own, which God had given him as a blessing on his land and labour. But no man's riches allow him to be voluptuous. The commands of taming and mortifying the flesh and not living after it, nor making provision for it; to satisfy its lusts, belong as much to the rich as to the poor. Though you are not to live in the same garb with the poor, you are as much bound to mortification and self-denial as the poorest. If you are richer than others, you have more to serve God with, but not more than others to serve the flesh with. If poverty deny them any thing which might better enable their bodies or minds to serve God, you may so far go beyond them, and use with thankfulness the mercies given you; but you must no more be flesh-pleasers than they.

5. And some deceive themselves by interposing sometimes a formal fast, as the fleshly Pharisee, that "fasted twice a week," Luke xviii. 12, and then they think that they are no sensualists. I speak not of the popish fasting with fish and delicacies (this is not so much as a show of mortification). But what if you really fast as oft as the Pharisees did, and quarrel with Christ's disciples for not fasting? Matt. ix. 14, 15. Will not a sensualist do as much as this if his physician require it for his health? If the scope of your lives be fleshly, it is not the interruption of a formal fast that will acquit you; which perhaps doth but quicken your appetite to the next meal.

## **Ch 09 Examples of People Mistakenly Accused of Flesh-Pleasing**

VII. Yet many are wrongfully taken by others (if not by themselves) to be sensual, by such mistakes as these:

1. Because they live not as meanly and scantily as the poor, who lack things necessary or helpful to their duty. But by that rule I must not be well, because other men are sick; or I must not go apace, because the lame can go but slowly! If poor men have bad horses, I may ride on the best I can get, to despatch my business, and redeem my time, so I prefer not costly, useless ostentation, before true serviceableness.

2. Others are accused as sensual, because the weakness of their bodies requireth a more tender usage, and diet, than healthful men's: some bodies are unfit for duty if they fast; and some are useless through sickness and infirmities, if they be not used with very great care. And it is as truly a duty to cherish a weak body to enable it for God's service, as to tame an unruly, lustful body, and keep it from offending him.

3. Some melancholy, conscientious persons are still accusing themselves, through mere scrupulosity; questioning almost all they eat, or drink, or wear, or do, whether it be not too much or too pleasing. But it is a cheerful sobriety that God requireth, which neither pampereth the body, nor yet disableth or hindereth it from its duty; and not an

unprofitable, wrangling scrupulosity.

## **Direction #1: Keep Your Mind on Heavenly Things**

Direction I. The first and grand direction against flesh-pleasing is, that you be sure, by a serious, living faith, to see the better things with God, and to be heartily taken up in minding, loving, seeking, and securing them. All the other directions are but subservient to this. For certainly man's soul will not be idle, being a living, active principle: and it is as certain, that it will not act but upon some end, or for some end. And there are no other ends to take us up, but either the things temporal or eternal. And therefore there is no true cure for a sensual love of temporal things, but to turn the heart to things eternal.

Believingly think first of the certainty, greatness, and eternity of the joys above; and then think that these may more certainly be yours, than any worldly riches or delights, if you do not contemptuously reject them. And then think that this is the time in which you must make sure of them, and win them, if ever you will possess them; and that you are sent into the world of purpose on this business. And then think with yourselves, how fleshly pleasures are the only competitors with the everlasting pleasures; and that, if ever you lose them, it will be by over-loving these transitory things; and that one half of your work for your salvation lieth in killing your affections to all below, that they may be alive to God alone. And lastly, think how much higher and sweeter pleasures, even in this life, the godly do enjoy than you; and you are losing them while you prefer these sordid pleasures. Do you think that a true believer hath not a more excellent delight in his forethoughts of his immortal blessedness with Christ and in the assurance of the love of God, and communion with him in his holy service, than you, or any sensualist, hath in fleshly pleasures? Sober and serious meditation on these things, will turn the mind to the true delights.

## **Direction #2: Know Yourself**

Direction II. Be acquainted with the range of sensual desires, and pay attention to them, and watch them in all their extravagances. Otherwise, while you are stopping one gap, they will be running out at many more. I have given you many instances in my "Treatise of Self-denial." I will here briefly set some before your eyes.

1. Watch your appetites as to meat and drink, both quantity and quality. Gluttony is a common, unobserved sin: the flesh no way enslaves men more than by the appetite; as we see in drunkards and gluttons, that can no more forbear than one that thirsteth in a burning fever.

2. Take heed of the lust of uncleanness, and all degrees of it, and approaches to it; especially immodest embraces and behaviour.

3. Take heed of ribald, filthy talk, and love songs, and of such incensing snares.
4. Take heed of too much sleep and idleness.
5. Take heed of taking too much delight in your riches, and lands, your buildings, and delectable conveniences.
6. Take heed lest honours, or worldly greatness, or men's applause, become your too great pleasure.
7. And lest you grow to make it your delight, to think on such things when you are alone, or talk idly of them in company with others.
8. And take heed lest the success and prosperity of your affairs do too much please you, as him, Luke xii. 20.
9. Take not up any inordinate pleasure in your children, relations, or nearest friends.
10. Take heed of a delight in vain, unprofitable, sinful company.
11. Or in fineness of apparel, to set you out to the eyes of others.
12. Take heed of a delight in romances, playbooks, feigned stories, useless news, which corrupt the mind, and waste your time.
13. Take heed of a delight in any recreations which are excessive, needless, devouring time, discomposing the mind, enticing to further sin, hindering any duty, especially our delight in God. They are miserable souls that can delight themselves in no more safe or profitable things, than cards, and dice, and stage plays, and immodest dancings.

### **Direction #3: Know What You Need to Do to Avoid Temptation**

Direction III. Next to the universal remedy mentioned in the first direction, see that you have the particular remedies still at hand, which your own particular way of flesh-pleasing doth most require. And let not the love of your vanity prejudice you against a just information, but impartially consider of the disease and the remedy. Of the particulars anon.

## **Direction #4: God Wants You To Have More Pleasure, Not Less**

Direction IV. Remember still that God would give you more pleasure, and not less, and that he will give you as much of the delights of sense as is truly good for you, so you will take them in their place, in subordination to your heavenly delights. And is not this to increase and multiply your pleasure? Are not health, and friends, and food, and convenient habitation, much sweeter as the fruit of the love of God, and the foretastes of everlasting mercies, and as our helps to heaven, and as the means to spiritual comfort, than of themselves alone? All your mercies are from God: he would take none from you, but sanctify them, and give you more.

## **Direction #5: Think Before You Gratify Your Appetites**

Direction V. See that reason keep up its authority, as the governor of sense and appetite. And so take an account, whatever the appetite would have, of the ends and reasons of the thing, and to what it doth conduce. Take nothing and do nothing merely because the sense or appetite would have it; but because you have reason so to do, and to gratify the appetite. Else you will deal as brutes, if reason be laid by (in human acts).

## **Direction #6: Remember Your Death**

Direction VI. Go to the grave, and see there the end of fleshly pleasure, and what is all that it will do for you at the last. One would think it should cure the mad desire of plenty and pleasure, to see where all our wealth, and mirth, and sport, and pleasure must be buried at last.

## **Direction #7: Remember Your Enemy**

Direction VII. Lastly, be still sensible that flesh is the grand enemy of your souls, and flesh-pleasing the greatest hinderance of your salvation. The devil's enmity and the world's are both but subordinate to this of the flesh: for its pleasure is the end, and the world's and Satan's temptations are both but the means to attain it.

## Concluding Admonitions

Besides the malignity opened before, consider,

1. How contrary a voluptuous life is to the blessed example of our Lord, and of his servant Paul, and all the apostles! Paul tamed his body and brought it into subjection, lest, having preached to others, himself should be a cast-away, I Cor. ix. 27. And all that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts thereof, Gal. v. 24. This was signified in the ancient manner of baptizing, (and so is still by baptism itself,) when they went over head in the water and then rose out of it, to signify that they were dead and buried with Christ, Rom. vi. 3, 4, and rose with him to newness of life. This is called our being "baptized into his death;" and seems the plain sense of I Cor. xv. 29, of being "baptized for the dead;" that is, "for dead" to show that we are dead to the world, and must die in the world, but shall rise again to the kingdom of Christ, both of grace and glory.

2. Sensuality showeth that there is no true belief of the life to come and proveth, so far as it prevaieth, the absence of all grace.

3. It is a homebred, continual traitor to the soul; a continual tempter, and nurse of all sin; the great withdrawer of the heart from God; and the common cause of apostasy itself: it still fighteth against the Spirit, Gal. v. 17; and is seeking advantage from all our liberties, Gal. v. 13; 2 Pet. ii. 10.

4. It turneth all our outward mercies into sin, and strengtheneth itself against God by his own benefits.

5. It is the great cause of our afflictions; for God will not spare that idol which is set up against him: flesh rebelleth, and flesh shall suffer.

6. And when it hath brought affliction, it is most impatient under it, and maketh it seem intolerable. A flesh-pleaser thinks he is undone, when affliction depriveth him of his pleasure.

7. Lastly, it exceedingly unfitteth men for death; for then flesh must be cast into the dust, and all its pleasure be at an end. Oh doleful day to those that had their good things here, and their portion in this life! when all is gone that ever they valued and sought; and all the true felicity lost, which they brutishly condemned! If you would joyfully then bear the dissolution and ruin of your flesh, oh master it, and mortify it now. Seek not the ease and pleasure of a little walking, breathing clay, when you should be seeking and foretasting the everlasting pleasure. Here lieth your danger and your work. Strive more against your own flesh, than against all your enemies in earth and hell: if you be saved from this, you are saved from them all. Christ suffered in the flesh, to tell you that it is not pampering, but suffering, that your flesh must expect, if you will reign with him.

Taken from Christian Ethics by Richard Baxter, part I, chapter 4.

