

Articles and Sermons :: A GODLY MAN IS A HEAVENLY MAN

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Heaven is in him before he is in heaven. The Greek word for saint, hagios, signifies a man taken away from the earth. A person may live in one place, yet belong to another. He may live in Spain yet be a free citizen of England. Pomponius lived in Athens yet was a citizen of Rome. So a godly man is a while in the world, but he belongs to the Jerusalem above. That is the place to which he aspires. Every day is Ascension Day with a believer. The saints are called "stars" for their sublimity; they have gone above into the upper region: "The way of life is above to the wise" (Prov. 15:24). A godly man is heavenly in six ways:

1. In his election.
2. In his disposition.
3. In his communication.
4. In his actions.
5. In his expectation.
6. In his conduct.

1. A godly man is heavenly in his election

He chooses heavenly objects. David chose to be a resident in God's house (Psa. 84:10). A godly person chooses Christ and grace before the most illustrious things under the sun. What a man is, that is his choice; and this choosing of God is best seen in a critical hour. When Christ and the world come into competition, and we part with the world to keep Christ and a good conscience, that is a sign we have chosen "the better part" (Luke 10:42).

2. A godly man is heavenly in his disposition

He sets his affections on things above (Col. 3:2). He sends his heart to heaven before he gets there; he looks upon the world as but a beautiful prison and he cannot be much in love with his fetters, though they are made of gold. A holy person contemplates glory and eternity; his desires have got wings and have fled to heaven. Grace is in the heart like fire, which makes it sparkle upwards in divine desires and ejaculations.

3. A godly man is heavenly in his communication

His words are sprinkled with salt to season others (Col. 4:6). As soon as Christ had risen from the grave, he was "speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3). No sooner has a man risen from the grave of unregeneracy than he is speaking of heaven: "The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious" (Eccles. 10:12). He speaks in such a heavenly manner as if he were already in heaven. The love he has for God will not allow him to be silent. The spouse being sick of love, her tongue was like the pen of a ready writer: "My beloved is white and ruddy, his head is as the most fine gold . . ." (Song 5:10,11). If there is wine in the house, the bush will be hung outside, and where there is a principle of godliness in the heart, it will vent itself at the lips; the bush will be hung up.

How can they be termed godly:

(i) Who are possessed with a dumb devil? They never have any good discourse. They are fluent and discursive enough in secular things: they can speak of their wares and drugs, they can tell what a good crop they have, but in matters of religion they are as if their tongue cleaved to the roof of their mouth. There are many people in whose company you cannot tell what to make of them, whether they are Turks or atheists, for they never speak a word of Christ.

(ii) Whose tongues are set on fire by hell? Their lips do not drop honey but poison, to the defiling of others. Plutarch says that speech ought to be like gold, which is of most value when it has least dross in it. Oh, the unclean, malicious words that some people utter! What an unsavoury stench comes from these dunghills! Those lips that gallop so fast in sin need David's bridle (Psa. 39:1). Can the body be healthy when the tongue is black? Can the heart be holy when the devil is in the lips? A godly man speaks "the language of Canaan". "They that feared the Lord spake often one to another" (Mal. 3:16).

4. A godly man is heavenly in his actions

The motions of the planets are celestial. A godly man is sublime and sacred in his motions; he works out salvation; he puts forth all his strength, as they did in the Greek Olympics, so that he may obtain the garland made of the flowers of paradise. He prays, fasts, watches, he offers violence to heaven, he is divinely actuated, he carries on God's interest in the

world, he does angels' work, he is seraphic in his actions.

5. A godly man is heavenly in his expectation

His hopes are above the world (Psa. 39:7): "In hope of eternal life" (Titus 1:2). A godly man casts anchor within the veil. He hopes to have his fetters of sin filed off; he hopes for such things as eye has not seen; he hopes for a kingdom when he dies, a kingdom promised by the Father, purchased by the Son, assured by the Holy Ghost. As an heir lives in hope of the time when such a great estate shall fall to him, so a child of God, who is a co-heir with Christ, hopes for glory. This hope comforts him in all varieties of condition: "we rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Rom. 5:2).

(i) This hope comforts a godly man in affliction; hope lightens and sweetens the most severe dispensations. A child of God can laugh with tears in his eyes; the time is shortly coming when the cross shall be taken off his shoulders and a crown set on his head. A saint at present is miserable, with a thousand troubles; in an instant, he will be clothed with robes of immortality, and advanced above seraphim.

(ii) This hope comforts a godly man in death: "the righteous hath hope in his death" (Prov. 14:32). If one should ask a dying saint, when all his earthly comforts have gone, what he had left, he would say, "the helmet of hope". I have read of a woman martyr who, when the persecutors commanded that her breasts should be cut off, said, "Tyrant, do your worst; I have two breasts which you can not touch, the one of faith and the other of hope". A soul that has this blessed hope is above the desire of life or the fear of death. Would anyone be troubled at exchanging a poor lease for an inheritance that will be for him and his heirs? Who would worry about parting with life, which is a lease that will soon run out, to be possessed of a glorious inheritance in light?

6. A godly man is heavenly in his conduct

He casts such a lustre of holiness as adorns his profession. He lives as if he had seen the Lord with his bodily eyes. What zeal, sanctity, humility, shines forth in his life! A godly person emulates not only the angels, but imitates Christ himself (1 John 2:6). The Macedonians celebrate the birthday of Alexander, on which day they wear his picture round their necks, set with pearl and rich jewels. So a godly man carries the lively picture of Christ about him in the heavenliness of his deportment: "our conversation is in heaven" (Phil. 3:20).

Use 1: Those who are eaten up with the world will be rejected, as ungodly, at the bar of judgment. To be godly and earthly is a contradiction: "For many walk, of whom I now tell you even weeping, that they are 'the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose god is their belly, who mind earthly things'" (Phil. 3:18, 19). We read that the earth swallowed up Korah alive (Numb. 16:32). This judgment is on many - the earth swallows up their time, thoughts and discourse. They are buried twice; their hearts are buried in the earth before their bodies. How sad it is that the soul, that princely thing, which is made for communion with God and angels, should be put to the mill to grind, and made a slave to the earth! How like the prodigal the soul has become, choosing rather to converse with swine and feed upon husks than to aspire after communion with the blessed Deity! Thus does Satan befool men, and keep them from heaven by making them seek a heaven here.

Use 2: As we would prove ourselves to be "born of God", let us be of a sublime, heavenly temper. We shall never go to heaven when we die unless we are in heaven while we live. That we may be more noble and raised in our affections, let us seriously weigh these four considerations:

1. God himself sounds a retreat to us to call us off the world: "Love not the world" (1 John 2: 15). We may use it as a posy of flowers to smell, but it must not lie like a bundle of myrrh between our breasts: "be not conformed to this world" (Rom. 12:2). Do not hunt after its honours and profits. God's providences, like his precepts, are to beat us off the world. Why does he send war and epidemics? What does the heat of this great anger mean? Surely dying times are to make men die to the world.

2. Consider how much below a Christian it is to be earthly-minded. We laugh sometimes at children when we see them busying themselves with toys, blowing bubbles in the air out of a shell, kissing their dolls, etc., when in the meantime we do the same! At death, what will all the world be which we so hug and kiss, but like a rag doll? It will yield us no more comfort then. How far it is below a heaven-born soul to be taken up with these things! No, when such as profess to be ennobled with a principle of piety and to have their hopes above, have their hearts below, how they disparage their heavenly calling and spot their silver wings of grace by beliming them with earth!

3. Consider what a poor, contemptible thing the world is. It is not worth setting the affections on; it cannot fill the heart. If Satan should take a Christian up to the mount of temptation and show him all the kingdoms and glory of the world, what could he show him but a fancy, an apparition? Nothing here can be proportionate to the immense soul of man. "In the ful

ness of his sufficiency he shall be in straits" (Job 20:22). Here is want in plenty. The creature will no more fill the soul than a drop will fill the bucket, and that little sweet we suck from the creature is intermixed with some bitterness, like that cup which the Jews gave Christ. "They gave him to drink wine mingled with myrrh" (Mark 15:23). And this imperfect sweet will not last long: "the world passeth away" (1 John 2:17). The creature merely salutes us, and is soon on the wing. The world rings changes. It is never constant except in its disappointments. How quickly we may remove our lodgings and make our pillow in the dust! The world is but a great inn where we are to stay a night or two and be gone. What madness it is so to set our heart upon our inn as to forget our home!

4. Consider what a glorious place heaven is.

We read of an angel coming down from heaven who "set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot on the earth" (Rev. 10:2). Had we only once been in heaven, and viewed its superlative glory, how we might in holy scorn trample with one foot on the earth and with the other foot on the sea! Heaven is called a better country: "But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly" (Heb. 11:16). Heaven is said to be a better country, in opposition to the country where we are now staying. What should we seek but that better country?

Question: In what sense is heaven a better country?

Answer 1: In that country above there are better delights. There is the tree of life, the rivers of pleasure. There is amazing beauty, unsearchable riches; there are the delights of angels; there is the flower of joy fully blown; there is more than we can ask or think (Eph. 3: 20). There is glory in its full dimensions and beyond all hyperbole.

Answer 2: In that country there is a better dwelling house:

(i) It is a house "not made with hands" (2 Cor. 5:1). To denote its excellence, there was never any house but was made with hands, but the house above surpasses the art of man or angel; none besides God could lay a stone in that building.

(ii) It is "eternal in the heavens". It is not a guest house but a mansion house. It is a house that will never be out of repair. "Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars" (Prov. 9:1), which can never moulder.

Answer 3: In that country there are better provisions; in our Father's house there is bread enough. Heaven was typified by Canaan, which flowed with milk and honey. There is the royal feast, the spiced wine; there is angels' food; there they serve up those rare foods and dainties, such as exceed not only our expressions, but our faith.

Answer 4: In that country there is better society. There is God blessed forever. How infinitely sweet and ravishing will a smile of his face be! The king's presence makes the court. There are the glorious cherubim. In this terrestrial country where we now live, we are among wolves and serpents; in that country above, we shall be among angels. There are "the spirits of just men made perfect" (Heb. 12:23). Here the people of God are clouded with infirmities; we see them with spots on their faces; they are full of pride, passion, censoriousness. In that Jerusalem above we shall see them in their royal attire, decked with unparalleled beauty, not having the least tincture or shadow of sin on them.

Answer 5: In that country there is a better air to breathe in. We go into the country for air; the best air is only to be had in that better country: (i) It is a more temperate air; the climate is calm and moderate; we shall neither freeze with the cold nor faint with the heat. (ii) It is a brighter air; there is a better light shining there. The Sun of righteousness enlightens that horizon with his glorious beams: "the Lamb is the light thereof" (Rev. 21:23). (iii) It is a purer air. The fens, which are full of black vapours, we count a bad air and unwholesome to live in. This world is a place of bogs and fens, where the noxious vapours of sin arise, which make it pestilential and unwholesome to live in; but in that country above, there are none of these vapours, but a sweet perfume of holiness. There is the smell of the orange tree and the pomegranate. There is the myrrh and cassia coming from Christ, which send forth a most odoriferous scent.

Answer 6: In that country there is a better soil. The land or soil is better:

(i) For its altitude. The earth, lying low, is of a baser pedigree; the element which is nearest heaven is purer and more excellent, like the fire. That country above is the high country; it is seated far above all the visible orbs (Psa. 24:3).

(ii) For its fertility; it bears a richer crop. The richest harvest on earth is the golden harvest, but the country above yields noble commodities. There are pearls celestial; there is the spiritual vine; there is the honeycomb of God's love dropping; there is the water of life, the hidden manna. There is fruit that does not rot, flowers that never fade. There is a crop which cannot be totally reaped; it will always be reaping time in heaven, and all this the land yields without the labour of plough

ing and sowing.

(iii) For its inoffensiveness. There are no briars there. The world is a wilderness where there are wicked men, and the "best of them is a brier" (Micah 7:4). They tear the people of God in their spiritual liberties, but in the country above there is not one briar to be seen; all the briars are burned.

(iv) For the rarity of the prospect; all that a man sees there is his own. I account that the best prospect where a man can see furthest on his own ground.

Answer 7: In that country there is better unity. All the inhabitants are knit together in love. The poisonous weed of malice does not grow there. There is harmony without division, and charity without envy. In that country above, as in Solomon's temple, no noise of hammer is heard.

Answer 8: In that country there is better employment; while we are here, we are complaining of our wants, weeping over our sins, but there we shall be praising God. How the birds of paradise will chirp when they are in that celestial country! There the morning stars will sing together, and all the saints of God will shout for joy.

Oh, what should we aspire after but this country above? Such as have their eyes opened, will see that it infinitely excels. An ignorant man looks at a star and it appears to him like a little silver spot, but the astronomer, who has his instrument to judge the dimension of a star, knows it to be many degrees bigger than the earth. So a natural man hears of the heavenly country that it is very glorious, but it is at a great distance. And because he has not a spirit of discernment, the world looks bigger in his eye. But such as are spiritual artists, who have the instrument of faith to judge heaven, will say it is by far the better country and they will hasten there with the sails of desire.

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