

Articles and Sermons :: THE SAINTS' REST IS NOT TO BE EXPECTED ON EARTH

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by Richard Baxter

In order to show the sin and folly of expecting rest here, 1. The reasonableness of present afflictions is considered; 1. That they are the way to rest; 2. Keep us from mistaking our rest; 3. From losing our way to it; 4. Quicken our pace toward it; 5. Chiefly incommode our flesh; 6. Under them the sweetest foretastes of rest are often enjoyed. II. How unreasonable to rest in present enjoyments; 1. That it is idolatry; 2. That it contradicts God's end in giving them; 3. Is the way to have them refused, withdrawn, or embittered; 4. That to be suffered to take up our rest here is the greatest curse; 5. That it is seeking rest where it is not; 6. That the creatures, without God, would aggravate our misery; 7. And all this is confirmed by experience. III. The unreasonableness of our unwillingness to die, and possess the saints' rest, is largely considered.

We are not yet come to our resting place. Doth it remain? How great, then, is our sin and folly to seek and expect it here! Where shall we find the Christian that deserves not this reproof? We would all have continual prosperity, because it is easy and pleasing to the flesh but we consider not the unreasonableness of such desires. And when we enjoy convenient houses, goods, lands, and revenues, or the necessary means God hath appointed for our spiritual good, we seek rest in these enjoyments. Whether we are in an afflicted or prosperous state, it is apparent we exceedingly make the creature our rest. Do we not desire earthly enjoyments more violently, when we want them, than we desire God himself? Do we not delight more in the possession of them, than in the enjoyment of God? And if we lose them, doth it not trouble us more than our loss of God? Is it not enough that they are refreshing helps in our way to heaven, but they must also be made our heaven itself? Christian reader, I would as willingly make thee sensible of this sin, as of any sin in the world, if I knew how to do it; for the Lord's great controversy with us is in this point. In order to this, I most earnestly beseech thee to consider the reasonableness of present afflictions, and the unreasonableness of resting in present enjoyments, as also of our unwillingness to die that we may possess eternal rest.

First. To show the reasonableness of present afflictions, consider—they are the way to rest; they keep us from mistaking our rest, and from losing the way to it; they quicken our pace toward it; they chiefly incommode our flesh; and under them God's people have often the sweetest foretastes of their rest.

1. Consider that labor and trouble are the common way to rest, both in the course of nature and grace. Can there possibly be rest without weariness? Do you not travail and toil first, and rest afterwards? The day for labor is first, and then follows the night for rest. Why should we desire the course of grace to be perverted, any more than the course of nature? It is an established decree, "that we must, through much tribulation, enter into the kingdom of God;" and that, "if we suffer, we shall also reign with Christ." And what are we that God's statutes should be reversed for our pleasure?

2. Afflictions are exceedingly useful to us, to keep us from mistaking our rest. A Christian's motion toward heaven is voluntary, and not constrained. Those means, therefore, are most profitable, which help his understanding and will. The most dangerous mistake of our souls is, to take the creature for God, and earth for heaven. What warm, affectionate, eager thoughts have we of the world, till afflictions cool and moderate them! Afflictions speak convincingly, and will be heard when preachers cannot. Many a poor Christian is sometimes bending his thoughts to wealth, or flesh-pleasing, or applause, and so loses his relish of Christ and the joy above, till God breaks in upon his riches, or children, or conscience, or health, and breaks down his mountain which he thought so strong. And then when he lieth in Manasseh's fetters, or is fastened to his bed with pining sickness, the world is nothing, and heaven is something. If our dear Lord did not put these thorns under our head, we should sleep out our lives and lose our glory.

3. Afflictions are also God's most effectual means to keep us from losing our way to our rest. Without this hedge of thorns on the right hand and left, we should hardly keep the way to heaven. If there be but one gap open, how ready are we to find it, and turn out at it! When we grow wanton, or worldly, or proud, how much doth sickness or other affliction reduce us! Every Christian, as well as Luther, may call affliction one of the best schoolmasters; and, with David, may say, "Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept thy word." Many thousand recovered sinners may cry, "O health

hful sickness! O comfortable sorrows! O gainful losses! O enriching poverty! O blessed day that ever I was afflicted! Not only the "green pastures and still waters, but the rod and staff, they comfort us." Though the word and Spirit do the main work, yet suffering so unbolts the door of the heart, that the word hath easier entrance.

4. Afflictions likewise serve to quicken our pace in the way to our rest. It were well if mere love would prevail with us, and that we were rather drawn to heaven than driven. But, seeing our hearts are so bad that mercy will not do it, it is better to be urged onward with the sharpest scourge, than loiter, like the foolish virgins, till the door is shut. O what a difference is there betwixt our prayers in health and in sickness! betwixt our repentings in prosperity and adversity! Alas! if we did not sometimes feel the spur, what a slow pace would most of us hold toward heaven! Since our vile natures require it, why should we be unwilling that God should do us good by sharp means? Judge, Christian, whether thou dost not go more watchfully and speedily in the way to heaven in thy sufferings, than in thy more pleasing and prosperous state.

5. Consider, further, it is but the flesh that is chiefly troubled and grieved by afflictions. In most of our sufferings the soul is free, unless we ourselves wilfully afflict it. "Why then, O my soul, dost thou side with this flesh, and complain as it complaineth? It should be thy work to keep it under, and bring it into subjection; and if God do it for thee, shouldst thou be discontented? Hath not the pleasing of it been the cause of almost all thy spiritual sorrows? Why, then, may not the displeasing of it further thy joy? Must not Paul and Silas sing because their feet are in the stocks? Their spirits were not imprisoned. Ah, Unworthy soul! is this thy thanks to God for preferring thee so far before thy body? When it is rotting in the grave thou shalt be a companion of the perfected spirits of the just. In the meantime, hast thou not consolation which the flesh knows not of? Murmur not, then, at God's dealings with thy body: if it were for want of love to thee, he would not have dealt so by all his saints. Never expect thy flesh should truly expound the meaning of the rod. It will call love hatred, and say, God is destroying, when he is saving. It is the suffering part, and therefore not fit to be the judge." Could we once believe God, and judge of his dealings by his word, and by their usefulness to our souls and reference to our rest, and could we stop our ears against all the clamors of the flesh, then we should have a truer judgment of our afflictions.

6. Once more, consider, God seldom gives his people so sweet a foretaste of their future rest as in their deep afflictions. He keeps his most precious cordials for the time of our greatest faintings and dangers. He gives them when he knows they are needed and will be valued, and when he is sure to be thanked for them, and that his people will be rejoiced by them. Especially when our sufferings are more directly for his cause, then he seldom fails to sweeten the bitter cup. The martyrs have possessed the highest joys. When did Christ preach such comfort to his disciples as when "their hearts were sorrowful" at his departure? When did he appear among them and say, "Peace be unto you," but when they were shut up for fear of the Jews? When did Stephen see heaven opened, but when he was giving up his life for the testimony of Jesus? Is not that our best state, wherein we have most of God? Why else do we desire to come to heaven? If we look for a heaven of fleshly delights, we shall find ourselves mistaken. Conclude, then, that affliction is not so bad a state for a saint in his way to rest. Are we wiser than God? Doth he not know what is good for us, as well as we? or is he not as careful of our good as we are of our own? Wo to us if he were not much more so, and if he did not love us better than we love either him or ourselves!

Say not, "I could bear any other affliction but this." If God had afflicted thee where thou canst bear it, thy idol would neither have been discovered nor removed. Neither say, "If God would ere long deliver me, I could be content to bear it." Is it nothing, that he hath promised it "shall work for thy good?" Is it not enough that thou art sure to be delivered at death? Nor let it be said, "If my affliction did not disable me from my duty, I could bear it." It doth not disable thee for that duty which tendeth to thy own personal benefit, but is the greatest quickening help thou canst expect. As for thy duty to others, it is not thy duty when God disables thee. Perhaps thou wilt say, "The godly are my afflictors; if it were ungodly men, I could easily bear it." Whoever is the instrument, the affliction is from God, and the deserving cause thyself; and is it not better to look more to God than to thyself? Didst thou not know that the best men are still sinful in part? Do not plead, "If I had but that consolation which God reserveth for suffering times, I should suffer more contentedly; but I do not perceive any such thing." The more you suffer for righteousness' sake, the more of this blessing you may expect; and the more you suffer for your own evil doing, the longer it will be before that sweetness comes. Are not the comforts you desire neglected or resisted? Have your afflictions wrought kindly with you, and fitted you for comfort? It is not suffering that prepares you for comfort, but the success and fruit of suffering upon your heart.

Secondly. To show the unreasonableness of resting in present enjoyments, consider—it is idolizing them; it contradicts God's end in giving them; it is the way to have them refused, withdrawn, or imbittered to be suffered to take up our rest here, is the greatest curse; it is seeking rest where it is not to be found; the creatures, without God, would aggravate our misery; and to confirm all this, we may consult our own and others' experience.

1. It is gross idolatry to make any creature, or means, our rest. To be the rest of the soul is God's own prerogative. As i

It is evident idolatry to place our rest in riches or honor, so it is but a more refined idolatry to take up our rest in excellent means of grace. How must we offend our dear Lord when we give him cause to complain, as he did of our fellow idolater: "My people have been lost sheep; they have forgotten their resting-place. My people can find rest in any thing rather than in me. They can delight in one another, but not in me. They can rejoice in my creatures and ordinances, but not in me. Yea, in their very labors and duties they seek for rest, but not in me. They had rather be any where than be with me. Are these their gods? Have these redeemed them? Will these be better to them than I have been, or than I would be?" If you yourselves had a wife, a husband, a son, who had rather be any where than in your company, and was never so merry as when farthest from you, would you not take it ill? So our God must needs do.

2. You contradict the end of God in giving these enjoyments. He gave them to help thee to him, and dost thou take up with them in his stead? He gave them to be refreshments in thy journey, and wouldst thou dwell in thy inn and go no farther? It may be said of all our comforts and ordinances, as is said of the Israelites, "The ark of the covenant of the Lord went not before them, to search out a resting-place for them." So do all God's mercies here. They are not that rest; as John professed he was not the Christ; but they are "voices crying in this wilderness," to bid us prepare, "for the kingdom of God, our true rest, is at hand." Therefore, to rest here, were to turn all mercies contrary to their own ends and to our own advantage, and to destroy ourselves with that which should help us.

3. It is the way to cause God either to deny the mercies we ask, or to take from us those we enjoy, or at least imbitter them to us. God is nowhere so jealous as here. If you had a servant whom your wife loved better than yourself, would you not take it ill of such a wife, and rid your house of such a servant? So, if the Lord see you begin to settle in the world, and say, "Here I will rest," no wonder if he soon, in his jealousy, unsettle you. If he love you, no wonder if he take that from you with which he sees you are destroying yourself. It hath long been my observation of many, that when they have attempted great works, and have just finished them or have aimed at great things in the world, and have just obtained them; or have lived in much trouble, and have just overcome it; and begin to look on their condition with content, and rest in it; they are then usually near to death or ruin. When a man is once at this language, "Soul, take thy ease," the next news usually is, "Thou fool, this night," or this month, or this year, "thy soul shall be required, and then whose shall these things be?" What house is there where this fool dwelleth not? Let you and I consider whether it be not our own case. Many a servant of God has been destroyed from the earth by being overvalued and overloved. I am persuaded, our discontentments and murmurings are not so provoking to God, nor so destructive to the sinner, as our too sweet enjoying and resting in a pleasing state. If God hath crossed you in wife, children, goods, friends, either by taking them away, or the comfort of them, try whether this be not the cause; for wheresoever your desires stop, and you say, "Now I am well," that condition you make your god, and engage the jealousy of God against it. Whether you be a friend to God or an enemy, you can never expect that God should suffer you quietly to enjoy your idols.

4. Should God suffer you to take up your rest here, it is one of the greatest curses that could befall you. It were better never to have a day of ease in the world; for then weariness might make you seek after true rest. But if you are suffered to sit down and rest here, a restless wretch you will be through all eternity. To "have their portion in this life," is the lot of the most miserable, perishing sinners. Does it become Christians, then, to expect so much here? Our rest is our heaven; and where we take our rest, there we make our heaven. And wouldst thou have but such a heaven as this?

5. It is seeking rest where it is not to be found. Your labor will be lost; and if you proceed, your soul's eternal rest too. Our rest is only in the full obtaining of our ultimate end. But that is not to be expected in this life; neither is rest, therefore, to be expected here. Is God to be enjoyed in the best church here as he is in heaven? How little of God the saints enjoy under the best means let their own complainings testify. Poor comforters are the best ordinances without God. Should a traveller take up his rest in the way? No; because his home is his journey's end. When you have all that creatures and means can afford, have you that you believed, prayed, suffered for? I think you dare not say so. We are like little children strayed from home, and God is now bringing us home, and we are ready to turn into any house, stay and play with every thing in our way, and sit down on every green bank, and much ado there is to get us home. We are also in the midst of our labors and dangers; and is there any resting here? What painful duties lie upon our hands! to our brethren, to our own souls, and to God; and what an arduous work, in respect to each of these, doth lie before us! And can we rest in the midst of all our labors? Indeed, we may rest on earth, as the ark is said to have "rested in the midst of Jordan" — a short and small rest; or as Abraham desired the "angels to turn in and rest themselves" in his tent, where they would have been loth to have taken up their dwelling. Should Israel have fixed their rest in the wilderness, among serpents, and enemies, and weariness and famine? Should Noah have made the ark his home, and have been loth to come forth when the waters were assuaged? Should the mariner choose his dwelling on the sea, and settle his rest in the midst of rocks, and sands, and raging tempests? Should a soldier rest in the thickest of his enemies? And are not Christians such travellers, such mariners, such soldiers? Have you not fears within and troubles without? Are we not in continual dangers? We cannot eat, drink, sleep, labor, pray, hear, converse, but in the midst of snares; and shall we sit down and rest here?

O Christian, follow thy work, look to thy dangers, hold on to the end, win the field, and come off the ground before thou think of a settled rest. Whenever thou talkest of a rest on earth, it is like Peter on the mount, "thou knowest not what thou sayest." If, instead of telling the converted thief "this day shalt thou be with me in paradise," Christ had said he should rest there upon the cross, would he not have taken it for derision? Methinks it would be ill resting in the midst of sickness and pain, persecutions and distresses. But if nothing else will convince us, yet sure the remains of sin, which so easily besets us, should quickly satisfy a believer that here is not his rest. I say, therefore, to every one that thinketh of rest on earth, "Arise ye, and depart, for this is not your rest, because it is polluted." These things cannot, in their nature, be a true Christian's rest. They are too poor to make us rich; too low to raise us to happiness; too empty to fill our souls; and of too short a continuance to be our eternal content. If prosperity, and whatsoever we here desire, be too base to make gods of; they are too base to be our rest. The soul's rest must be sufficient to afford it perpetual satisfaction. But the content which creatures afford waxes old, and abates after a short enjoyment. If God should rain down angel's food, we should soon loathe the manna. If novelty support not, our delights on earth grow dull. All creatures are to us as flowers to the bee; there is but little honey on any one, and therefore there must be but a superficial taste, and so to the next. The more the world is known, the less it satisfieth. Those only are taken with it, who see no farther than its outward beauty, without discerning its inward vanity. When we thoroughly know the condition of other men, and have discovered the evil as well as the good, and the defects as well as the perfections; we then cease our admiration.

6. To have creatures and means without God, is an aggravation of our misery. If God should say, "Take my creatures, my word, my servants, my ordinances, but not myself;" would you take this for happiness? If you had the word of God, and not "the Word," who is God; or the bread of the Lord, and not the Lord, who "is the true bread;" or could cry with the Jews, "The temple of the Lord," and had not the Lord of the temple; this were a poor happiness. Was Capernaum the more happy, or the more miserable, for seeing the mighty works which they had seen, and hearing the words of Christ which they did hear? Surely that which aggravates our sin and misery cannot be our rest.

7. To confirm all this, let us consult our own and others' experience. Millions have made the trial, but did any ever find a sufficient rest for his soul on earth? Delights I deny not but they have found, but rest and satisfaction they never found. And shall we think to find that which never man could find before us? Ahab's kingdom is nothing to him without Naboth's vineyard; and did that satisfy him when he obtained it? Were you, like Noah's dove, to look through the earth for a resting-place, you would return confessing that you could find none. Go ask honor, Is there rest here? You may as well rest on the top of tempestuous mountains, or in Aetna's flames. Ask riches, Is there rest here? Even such as is in a bed of thorns. If you inquire for the rest of worldly pleasure, it is such as the fish hath in swallowing the bait; when the pleasure is sweetest, death is nearest. Go to learning, and even to divine ordinances, and inquire whether there your soul may rest. You might indeed receive from these an olive branch of hope, as they are means to your rest, and have relation to eternity; but, in regard of any satisfaction in themselves, you would remain as restless as ever. How well might all these answer us, as Jacob did Rachel, "Am I in God's stead," that you come to me for soul-rest? Not all the states of men in the world; neither court nor country, towns nor cities, shops nor fields, treasures, libraries, solitude, society, studies, nor pulpits, can afford any such thing as this rest. If you could inquire of the dead of all generations, or of the living through all dominions, they would all tell you, "there is no rest." Or, if other men's experience move you not, take a view of your own. Can you remember the state that did fully satisfy you? or, if you could, will it prove lasting? I believe we may all say of our earthly rest, as Paul of our hope, "If it were in this life only, we are of all men the most miserable."

If, then, either Scripture or reason, or the experience of ourselves and all the world, will convince us, we may see there is no resting here. And yet how guilty are the generality of us of this sin! How many halts and stops do we make before we will make the Lord our rest! How must God even drive us, and fire us out of every condition, lest we should sit down and rest there! If he gives us prosperity, riches, or honor, we do in our hearts dance before them, as the Israelites before their calf, and say, "These are thy gods," and conclude "it is good to be here." If he imbitter all these to us, how restless are we till our condition be sweetened, that we may sit down again and rest where we were! If he proceed in the cure, and take the creature quite away, then we labor, and cry, and pray that God would restore it, that we may make it our rest again! And while we are deprived of our former idol, yet, rather than come to God, we delight ourselves in the hope of recovering it, and make that very hope our rest, or search about from creature to creature to find out something to supply the room; yea, if we can find no supply, yet we will rather settle in this misery, and make a rest of a wretched being, than leave all and come to God.

O the cursed aversion of our souls from God! If any place in hell were tolerable, the soul would rather take up its rest there than come to God. Yea, when he is bringing us over to him, and hath convinced us of the worth of his ways and service, the last deceit of all is here; we will rather settle upon those ways that lead to him, and those ordinances that speak of him, and those gifts which flow from him, than come entirely over to himself. Christian, marvel not that I speak so much

of resting in these; beware, lest it prove thy own case. I suppose thou art so far convinced of the vanity of riches, honor and pleasure, that thou canst more easily disclaim these; and it is well if it be so; but the means of grace thou lookest on with less suspicion, and thinkest thou canst not delight in them too much, especially seeing most of the world despise them, or delight in them too little. I know they must be loved and valued and he that delighteth in any worldly thing more than in them, is not a Christian. But when we are content with ordinances without God, and had rather be at public worship than in heaven, and a member of the church here than of the perfect church above, this is a sad mistake. So far let thy soul take comfort in ordinances as God doth accompany them; remembering, this is not heaven, but the first-fruits. "while we are present in the body, we are absent from the Lord;" and while we are absent from him, we are absent from our rest. If God were as willing to be absent from us as we from him, and as loth to be our rest as we to rest in him, we should be left to an eternal restless separation. In a word, as you are sensible of the sinfulness of your earthly discontents, so be you also of your irregular satisfaction, and pray God to pardon them much more. And, above all the plagues on this side hell, see that you watch and pray against settling any where short of heaven, or reposing your soul on any thing below God.

Thirdly. The next thing to be considered is our unreasonable unwillingness to die, that we may possess the saints' rest. We linger, like Lot in Sodom, till "the Lord, being merciful unto us, doth pluck us away against our will. I confess that death, of itself, is not desirable; but the soul's rest with God is, to which death is the common passage. Because we are apt to make light of this sin, let me set before you its nature and remedy, in a variety of considerations.

It has in it much infidelity. If we did verily believe that the promise of this glory is the word of God, and that God truly means as he speaks, and is fully resolved to make it good; if we did verily believe that there is indeed such blessedness prepared for believers, surely we should be as impatient of living as we are now fearful of dying, and should think every day a year till our last day should come. Is it possible that we can truly believe that death will remove us from misery to such glory, and yet be loth to die? If the doubts of our own interest in that glory make us fear, yet a true belief of the certainty and excellency of this rest would make us restless till our title to it be cleared. Though there is much faith and Christianity in our mouths, yet there is much infidelity and paganism in our hearts, which is the chief cause that we are so loth to die.

It is also much owing to the coldness of our love. If we love our friend, we love his company; his presence is comfortable, his absence is painful; when he comes to us, we entertain him with gladness; when he dies, we mourn, and usually over-mourn. To be separated from a faithful friend, is like the rending of a member from our body. And would not our desires after God be such, if we really loved him? Nay, should it not be much more than such, as he is, above all friends, most lovely? May the Lord teach us to look closely to our hearts, and take heed of self-deceit in this point! Whatever we pretend, if we love either father, mother, husband, wife, child, friend, wealth, or life itself, more than Christ, we are yet "none of his" sincere "disciples." When it comes to the trial, the question will not be, Who hath preached most, or heard most, or talked most? but, who hath loved most? Christ will not take sermons, prayers, fastings; no, nor the "giving our goods," nor the "burning our bodies," instead of love. And do we love him, and yet care not how long we are from him? Was it such a joy to Jacob to see the face of Joseph in Egypt? and shall we be contented without the sight of Christ in glory, and yet say we love him? I dare not conclude that we have no love at all, when we are so loth to die; but I dare say, were our love more, we should die more willingly. If this holy flame were thoroughly kindled in our breasts, we should cry out with David, "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God! My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?"

By our unwillingness to die, it appears we are little weary of sin. Did we feel sin to be the greatest evil, we should not be willing to have its company so long. "O foolish, sinful heart! hast thou been so long a cage of all unclean lusts, a fountain incessantly pouring forth the bitter waters of transgression, and art thou not yet weary? Wretched soul! hast thou been so long wounded in all thy faculties, so grievously languishing in all thy performances, so fruitful a soil of all iniquities, and art thou not yet more weary? Wouldst thou still lie under thy imperfections? Hath thy sin proved so profitable a commodity, so necessary a companion, such a delightful employment, that thou dost so much dread the parting day? May not God justly grant thee thy wishes, and seal thee a lease of thy desired distance from him, and nail thy ears to these doors of misery, and exclude thee eternally from his glory?"

It shows that we are insensible of the vanity of earth, when we are so loth to hear or think of a removal. "Ah, foolish, wretched soul! doth every prisoner groan for freedom? and every slave desire his jubilee? and every sick man long for health? and every hungry man for food? and dost thou alone abhor deliverance? Doth the sailor wish to see land? Doth the husbandman desire the harvest, and the laborer to receive his pay? Doth the traveller long to be at home, and the racer to win the prize, and the soldier to win the field? and art thou loth to see thy labors finished, and to receive the end of thy faith and sufferings? Have thy griefs been only dreams? If they were, yet methinks thou shouldst not be afraid of waking.

Or is it not rather the world's delights that are all mere dreams and shadows? Or is the world become of late more kind? We may at our peril reconcile ourselves to the world, but it will never reconcile itself to us. O unworthy soul! who hadst rather dwell in this land of darkness, and wander in this barren wilderness, than be at rest with Jesus Christ! who hadst rather stay among the wolves, and daily suffer the scorpion's stings, than praise the Lord with the host of heaven.

This unwillingness to die doth actually impeach us of high treason against the Lord. Is it not choosing earth before him, and taking present things for our happiness, and consequently making them our very god? If we did indeed make God our end, our rest, our portion, our treasure, how is it possible but we should desire to enjoy him? It, moreover, discovers some dissimulation. Would you have any man believe you when you call the Lord your only hope, and speak of Christ as a life in all, and of the joy that is in his presence, and yet would endure the hardest life, rather than die and enter into his presence? What self-contradiction is this, to talk so hardly of the world and the flesh, to groan and complain of sin and suffering, and yet fear no day more than that we expect should bring our final freedom! What hypocrisy is this to profess to strive and fight for heaven, which we are loth to come to! and spend one hour after another in prayer for that which we would not have! Hereby we wrong the Lord and his promises, and disgrace his ways in the eyes of the world; as if we would persuade them to question whether God be true to his word or not; whether there be any such glory as the Scripture mentions. When they see those so loth to leave their hold of present things, who have professed to live by faith, and have boasted of their hopes in another world, and spoken disgracefully of all things below, in comparison of things above, how doth this confirm the world in their unbelief and sensuality! "Surely," say they, "if these professors did expect so much glory, and make so light of the world as they seem, they would not themselves be so loth to change." O how are we ever able to repair the wrong which we do to God and souls by this scandal? And what an honor to God, what a strengthening to believers, what a conviction to unbelievers would it be, if Christians in this did answer their profession. and cheerfully welcome the news of rest!

It also evidently shows that we have spent much time to little purpose. Have we not had all our life-time to prepare to die; so many years to make ready for one hour; and are we so unready and unwilling yet? What have we done? Why have we lived? Had we any greater matters to mind? Would we have wished for more frequent warnings? How oft hath death entered the habitations of our neighbors! How often hath it knocked at our own door! How many diseases have vexed our bodies, that we have been forced to receive the sentence of death! And are we unready and unwilling after all this? O careless, dead-hearted sinners! unworthy neglecters of God's warnings! faithless betrayers of our own souls!

Consider, not to die is never to be happy. To escape death is to miss of blessedness, except God should translate us, as Enoch and Elijah, which he never did before or since. "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." If you would not die and go to heaven, what would you have more than an epicure or a beast? Why do we pray, and fast, and mourn; why do we suffer the contempt of the world; why are we Christians, and not pagans and infidels, if we do not desire a life to come? Wouldst thou lose thy faith and labor, Christian; all thy duties and sufferings, all the end of thy life, and all the blood of Christ, and be contented with the portion of a worldling or a brute? Rather say, as one did on his deathbed, when he was asked whether he was willing to die or not, "Let him be loth to die who is loth to be with Christ." Is God willing by death to glorify us, and are we unwilling to die, that we may be glorified? Methinks, if a prince were willing to make you his heir, you would scarce be unwilling to accept it; the refusing such a kindness would discover ingratitude and unworthiness. As God hath resolved against them who make excuses when they should come to Christ, "None of those men, who were bidden, shall taste of my supper;" so it is just with him to resolve against us, who frame excuses when we should come to glory.

The Lord Jesus Christ was willing to come from heaven to earth for us, and shall we be unwilling to remove from earth to heaven for ourselves and him! He might have said, "What is it to me if these sinners suffer? If they value their flesh above their spirits, and their lusts above my Father's love; if they will sell their souls for naught, who is it fit should be the loser? Should I, whom they have wronged? Must they wilfully transgress my law, and I undergo their deserved pain? Must I come down from heaven to earth, and clothe myself with human flesh, be spit upon, and scorned by man, and fast, and weep, and sweat, and suffer, and bleed, and die a cursed death; and all this for wretched worms who would rather hazard their souls than forbear one forbidden morsel? Do they cast away themselves so slightly, and must I redeem them so dearly?" Thus we see Christ had reason enough to have made him unwilling; and yet did he voluntarily condescend. But we have no reason against our coming to him; except we will reason against our hopes, and plead for a perpetuity of our own calamities. Christ came down to raise us up; and would we have him lose his blood and labor and go again with out us? Hath he bought our rest at so dear a rate? Is our inheritance "purchased with his blood?" And are we, after all this, loth to enter? Ah, sirs! it was Christ, and not we, that had cause to be loth. May the Lord forgive and heal this foolish ingratitude!

Do we not combine with our most cruel foes in their most malicious designs, while we are loth to die and go to heaven?

What is the devil's daily business? Is it not to keep our souls from God? And shall we be content with this? Is it not the one half of hell which we wish to ourselves, while we desire to be absent from heaven? What sport is this to Satan, that his desires and thine, Christian, should so concur! that, when he sees he can not get thee to hell, he can so long keep thee out of heaven, and make thee the earnest petitioner for it thyself! O gratify not the devil so much to thy own injury! Do not our daily fears of death make our lives a continual torment? Those lives which might be full of joy, in the daily contemplation of the life to come, and the sweet, delightful thoughts of bliss; how do we fill them up with causeless terrors! Thus we consume our own comforts, and prey upon our truest pleasures. When we might lie down, and rise up, and walk a broad, with our hearts full of the joys of God, we continually fill them with perplexing fears. For he that fears dying, must be always fearing because he hath always reason to expect it. And how can that man's life be comfortable who lives in continual fear of losing his comforts? Are not these fears of death self-created sufferings? as if God had not inflicted enough upon us, but we must inflict more upon ourselves. Is not death bitter enough to the flesh of itself, but we must double and treble its bitterness? The sufferings laid upon us by God do all lead to happy issues; the progress is from tribulation to patience, from thence to experience, and so to hope, and at last to glory. But the sufferings we make for ourselves are circular and endless, from sin to suffering, from suffering to sin, and so to suffering again; and not only so, but they multiply in their course; every sin is greater than the former, and so every suffering also: so that, except we think God hath made us to be our own tormentors, we have small reason to nourish our fears of death.

And are they not useless, unprofitable fears? As all our care "cannot make one hair white or black, nor add one cubit to our stature," so neither can our fear prevent our sufferings, nor delay our death one hour: willing or unwilling, we must away. Many a man's fears have hastened his end, but no man's did ever avert it. It is true, a cautious fear concerning the danger after death hath profited many, and is very useful to the preventing of that danger; but for a member of Christ, and an heir of heaven, to be afraid of entering his own inheritance, is a sinful, useless fear. And do not our fears of dying ensnare our souls, and add strength to many temptations? What made Peter deny his Lord? What makes apostates in suffering times forsake the truth? Why does the green blade of unrooted faith wither before the beat of persecution? Fear of imprisonment and poverty may do much, but fear of death will do much more. So much fear as we have of death, so much cowardice we usually have in the cause of God; besides the multitude of unbelieving contrivances, and discontent at the wise disposal of God, and hard thoughts of most of his providences, of which this sin makes us guilty.

Let us further consider what sufficient time most of us have had. Why should not a man, that would die at all, be as willing at thirty or forty, if God see fit, as at seventy or eighty? Length of time does not conquer corruption; it never withers nor decays through age. Except we receive an addition of grace as well as time, we naturally grow worse. "O my soul, depart in peace! As thou wouldst not desire an unlimited state in wealth and honor, so desire it not in point of time. If thou wast sensible how little thou deservest an hour of that patience which thou hast enjoyed, thou wouldst think thou hadst had a large part. Is it not divine wisdom that sets the bounds? God will honor himself by various persons and ages, and not by one person or age. Seeing thou hast acted thy own part, and finished thy appointed course, come down contentedly, that others may succeed, who must have their turns as well as thyself. Much time hath much duty; beg therefore for grace to improve it better; but be content with thy share of time.

"Thou hast also had a competency of the comforts of life. God might have made thy life a burden, till thou hadst been as weary of possessing it as thou art now afraid of losing it. He might have suffered thee to have consumed thy days in ignorance, without the true knowledge of Christ: but he hath opened thy eyes in the morning of thy days, and acquainted thee betimes with the business of thy life. Hath thy heavenly Father caused thy lot to fall in Europe, not in Asia or Africa; in England, not in Spain or Italy? Hath he filled up all thy life with mercies, and dost thou now think thy share too small? What a multitude of hours of consolation, of delightful Sabbaths, of pleasant studies; of precious companions, of wonderful deliverances, of excellent opportunities, of fruitful labors, of joyful tidings, of sweet experiences, of astonishing providences, hath thy life partaken of! Hath thy life been so sweet that thou art loth to leave it? Is this thy thanks to Him who is thus drawing thee to his own sweetness? O foolish soul! would thou wast as covetous after eternity as thou art for a fading, perishing life! and after the presence of God in glory, as thou art for continuance on earth! Then thou wouldst cry, "Why is his chariot so long in coming? why tarry the wheels of his chariot?" How long, Lord? how long? What if God should let thee live many years, but deny thee the mercies which thou hast hitherto enjoyed? Might he not give thee life, as he gave the murmuring Israelites quails? He might give thee life till thou art weary of living, and as glad to be rid of it as Judas or Ahithophel; and make thee like many miserable creatures in the world, who can hardly forbear laying violent hands on themselves. Be not therefore so importunate for life, which may prove a judgment instead of a blessing. How many of the precious servants of God, of all ages and places, have gone before thee! Thou art not to enter an untrodden path, nor appointed first to break the ice. Except Enoch and Elijah, which of the saints have escaped death? And art thou better than they? There are many millions of saints dead, more than now remain on earth. What a number of thine own bosom friends and companions in duty are now gone, and why shouldst thou be so loth to follow? Nay, hath not Jesus Christ himself gone this way? Hath he not sanctified the grave to us, and perfumed the dust with his own body, and art thou loth to

o follow him too? Rather say as Thomas, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.' If what has been said will not persuade, Scripture and reason have little force. And I have said the more on this subject, finding it so needful to myself and others; finding among so many Christians, who could do and suffer much for Christ, so few that can willingly die; and of many, who have somewhat subdued other corruptions, so few that have gotten the conquest of this. I persuade not the ungodly from fearing death; it is a wonder that they fear it no more, and spend not their days in continual horror.

Re: THE SAINTS' REST IS NOT TO BE EXPECTED ON EARTH, on: 2008/8/10 16:15

"..The martyrs have possessed the highest joys. When did Christ preach such comfort to his disciples as when "their hearts were sorrowful" at his departure? When did he appear among them and say, "Peace be unto you," but when they were shut up for fear of the Jews? When did Stephen see heaven opened, but when he was giving up his life for the testimony of Jesus? Is not that our best state, wherein we have most of God? Why else do we desire to come to heaven? If we look for a heaven of fleshly delights, we shall find ourselves mistaken. .."

Re:, on: 2008/8/10 22:30

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