

Quotes from The saints everlasting rest

By Richard Baxter

Take God in Christ for thy only rest, and fix thy heart upon him above all. May the living God, who is the portion and rest of his saints, make these our carnal minds so spiritual, and our earthly hearts so heavenly that loving him, and delighting in him, may be the work of our lives.

They that never yet knew they were without God, and in the way to hell, never yet knew the way to heaven. Can a man find he hath lost his God and his soul, and not cry, I am undone? The reason why so few obtain this rest, is, they will not be convinced that they are, in point of title, distant from it and, in point of practice, Contrary to it. Whoever sought for that which he knew not he had lost? "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.

Never did a soul obtain rest with God whose desire was not set upon him above all things else in the world.

Pardon thy servant, O Lord. I have not pried into unrevealed things. I bewail that my apprehensions are so dull, my thoughts so mean, my affections so stupid, and my expressions so low and unbecoming such a glory. I have only heard by the hearing of the ear: O let thy servant see thee, and possess these joys; then shall I have more suitable conceptions, and shall give thee fuller glory; I shall abhor my present self, and disclaim and renounce all these imperfections.

2

Every talent of time, health, abilities, mercies, afflictions, means, warnings, must be reckoned for. The sins of youth, those which they had forgotten, and their secret sins, shall all be laid open before angels and men. They shall see the Lord Jesus, whom they neglected,

whose word they disobeyed, whose ministers they abused, whose servants they hated, now sitting to judge them. Their own consciences shall cry out against them, and call to their remembrance all their misdoings. Which way will the wretched sinner look? Who can conceive the terrible thoughts of his heart? Now the world cannot help him; his old companions cannot; the saints neither can nor will. Only the Lord Jesus can; but there is the misery, he will not. Time was, sinner, when Christ would, and you would not; now, fain would you, and he will not.

Well then, let the terror of that day be never so great, surely our Lord can mean no ill to us in all. Let it make the devils tremble, and the wicked tremble, but it shall make us leap for joy. It must affect us deeply with the sense of our mercy and happiness, to see the most of the world tremble with terror, while we triumph with joy; to hear them doomed to everlasting flames, when we are proclaimed heirs of the kingdom; to see our neighbour's, that lived in the same town, came to the same congregation, dwelt in the same houses, and were esteemed more honourable in the world than ourselves, now, by the Searcher of hearts, eternally separated.

3

How will it fill our souls with perpetual joy, to think that in the streams of this blood we have swum through the violence of the world, the snares of Satan, the seductions of flesh, the curse of the law, the wrath of an offended God, the accusations of a guilty conscience, and the vexing doubts and fears of an unbelieving heart, and are arrived safely at the presence of God!

O the everlasting admiration that must surprise the saints to think of this freeness! "What did the Lord see in me, that he should judge me meet for such a state? That I, who was but a poor, diseased, despised wretch, should be clad in the brightness of this glory! That I, a creeping worm, should be advanced to this high dignity! That I, who was but lately groaning, weeping, dying, should now be as full of joy as my heart can hold! yea, should be taken from the grave where I was decaying, and from the dust and darkness where I seemed forgotten, and be here set before his throne!

How quick and piercing is the word in itself! yet many times it never enters, being managed by a feeble arm. What weight and worth is there in every passage of the blessed Gospel! enough, one would think, to enter and pierce the dullest soul, and wholly possess its thoughts and affections; and yet how oft does it fall as water upon a stone! The things of God which we handle, are divine; but our manner of handling is human. There is little we touch, but we leave the print of our fingers behind.

Temporal crowns and kingdoms could not make a rest for saints. As they were not redeemed with so low a price, neither are they endued with so low a nature.

The knowledge of God and his Christ, a delightful complacency in that mutual love, an everlasting rejoicing in the enjoyment of our God, with a perpetual singing of his high praises; this is heaven for a saint. Then we shall live in our own element. We are now as the fish in a vessel of water, only so much as will keep them alive; but what is that to the ocean?

Oh the hourly dangers that we here walk in! Every sense and member is a snare; every creature, every mercy, and every duty is a snare to us. We can scarce open our eyes but we are in danger of envying those above us, or despising those below us; of coveting the honors and riches of some, or beholding the rags and beggary of others with pride and unmercifulness. If we see beauty, it is a bait to lust; if deformity, to loathing and disdain. How soon do slanderous reports, vain jests, wanton speeches, creep into the heart! How constant and strong a watch does our appetite require! Have we comeliness and beauty? What fuel for pride! Are we deformed? What an occasion of repining! Have we strength of reason and gifts of learning? O how prone to be puffed up, hunt after applause, and despise our brethren! Are we unlearned? How apt then to despise what we have not! Are we in places of authority? How strong is the temptation to abuse our trust, make our will our law, and mould all the enjoyments of others by the rules and model of our own interest and policy! Are we inferiors? How prone to envy others' pre-eminence, and bring their actions to the bar of our judgment! Are we rich, and not too much exalted?

Bind all reproaches as a crown to your heads. Esteem them greater riches than the world's

treasures.

The church on earth is a mere hospital! Some groaning under a dark understanding, some under an insensible heart, some anguishing under unfruitful weakness, and some bleeding for miscarriages and wilfulness; some crying out of their poverty, some groaning under pains and infirmities, and some bewailing a whole catalogue of calamities. But a far greater grief it is, to see our dearest and most intimate friends turned aside from the truth of Christ, continuing their neglect of Christ and their souls, and nothing will awaken them out of their security: to look on an ungodly father or mother, brother or sister, wife or husband, child or friend, and think how certainly they shall be in hell for ever, if they die in their present unregenerated state; to think of the Gospel departing, the glory taken from our Israel, poor souls left willingly dark and destitute, and blowing out the light that should guide them to salvation! Our day of rest will free us from all this, and the days of mourning shall be ended. Then thy people, O Lord, shall be all righteous; they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of thy planting, the work of thy hands; that thou mayest be glorified.

Mortality is the disgrace of all sublunary delights. How it spoils our pleasure to see it dying in our hands!.. O my soul, let go thy dreams of present pleasure, and loose thy hold of earth and flesh. Study frequently, study thoroughly this one word—eternity...This word, everlasting, contains the perfection of their torment and our glory. O that the sinner would study this word; methinks it would startle him out of his dead sleep! O that the gracious soul would study it; methinks it would revive him in his deepest agony!

What kind of men, dost thou think, would Christians be in their lives and duties, if they had still this glory fresh in their thoughts? what frame would their spirits be in, if their thoughts of heaven were lively and believing? Would their hearts be so heavy; their countenances so sad? or would they have need to take up their comforts from below? Would they be so loth to suffer; so afraid to die? or would they not think every day a year till they enjoy it?

To be the people of God without regeneration, is as impossible as to be the children of men without generation. Seeing we are born God's enemies, we must be new-born his sons, or else remain enemies still. The greatest reformation of life that can be attained, without this new life wrought in the soul, may procure our further delusion, but never our salvation.

The sinner (at salvation) is made to know and feel that the sin which was his delight, is a more loathsome thing than a toad or serpent, and a greater evil than plague or famine; being a breach of the righteous law of the most high God, dishonourable to him, and destructive to the sinner. Now the sinner no more hears the reproofs of sin as words of course; but the mention of his sin speaks to his very heart, and yet he is willing you should show him the worst. He was wont to marvel what made men keep up such a stir against sin; what harm it was for a man to take little forbidden pleasure; he saw no such heinousness in it that Christ must needs die for it, and a Christless world be eternally tormented in hell. Now the case is altered; God hath opened his eyes to see the inexpressible vileness of sin.

They who before read the threats of God's law as men do the story of foreign wars, now find it their own story, and perceive they read their own doom, as if they found their own names written in the curse, or heard the law say, as Nathan, "Thou art the man." The wrath of God seemed to him before but a storm to a man in a dry house, or as the pains of the sick to the healthful stander-by; but now he finds the disease is his own, and feels himself a condemned man: that he is dead and damned in point of law, and that nothing is wanting but mere execution to make him absolutely and irrecoverably miserable. This is a work of the Spirit wrought in some measure in all the regenerate. How should he come to Christ for pardon who did not first find himself guilty and condemned? or for life, who never found himself spiritually dead?

Every man is naturally an idolater. Our hearts turned from God in our first fall; and, ever since, the creature hath been our god. This is the grand sin of our nature. Every unregenerate man ascribes to the creature divine prerogatives, and allows it the highest room in his soul; or, if he is convinced of misery, he flies to it as his saviour. Indeed, God and His Christ shall be called Lord and Savion; but the real expectation is from the creature, and

the work of God is laid upon it. Pleasure, profit and honour, are the natural man's trinity and his carnal self is these in unity.

When God should guide us, we guide ourselves; when he should be our Sovereign, we rule ourselves: the laws which he gives us, we find fault with, and would correct and, if we had the making of them, we would have made them otherwise: when he should take care of us, (and must, or we perish,) we will take care for ourselves: when we should depend on him in daily receiving, we had rather have our portion in our own hands: when we should submit to his providence, we usually quarrel with it, and think we could make a better disposal than God hath made. When we should study and love, trust and honour God, we study and love, trust and honour our carnal selves. Instead of God, we would have all men's eyes and dependence on us, and all men's thanks returned to us, and would gladly be the only men on earth extolled and admired by all. Thus we are naturally our own idols. But down falls this Dagon when God once renews the soul.

This is the reason why affliction so frequently concurs in the work of conversion. Arguments which speak to the quick, will force a hearing when the most powerful words are slighted. If a sinner made his credit his god, and God cast him into the lowest disgrace, or bring him, who idolized his riches, into a condition wherein they cannot help him, or cause them to take wing and fly away, what a help is here to this work of conviction! If a man made pleasure his god, whatsoever a roving eye, a curious ear, a greedy appetite, or a lustful heart could desire, and God take these from him, or turn them into gall and wormwood, what a help is here to conviction!

The sin which the understanding pronounces evil, the will turns from with abhorrence. Not that the sensitive appetite is changed, or any way made to abhor its object; but when it would prevail against reason, and carry us to sin against God, instead of Scripture being the rule, and reason the master, and sense the servant, this disorder and evil the will abhors. The misery also, which sin hath procured, is not only discerned, but bewailed. It is impossible that the soul should now look either on its trespass against God, or yet on its own self-procured calamity, without some contrition. He that truly discerns that he hath killed Christ, and killed himself, will surely in some measure be pricked to the heart.

Can we seek Christ to reconcile us to God, while in our hearts we prefer the creature before him? In the soul of every unregenerate man the creature is both God and Christ. As turning from the creature to God, and not by Christ, is no true turning; so believing in Christ, while the creature hath our hearts, is no true believing. Our aversion from sin, renouncing our idols, and our right receiving Christ, is all but one work, which God ever perfects where he begins.

To accept Christ without affection and love, is not justifying faith: nor does love follow as a fruit, but immediately concurs; for faith is the receiving of Christ with the whole soul. "He that loveth father or mother more than Christ, is not worthy of him," nor is justified by him. Faith accepts him as Savion and Lord: for in both relations will he be received, or not at all. Faith not only acknowledges his sufferings, and accepts of pardon and glory, but acknowledges his sovereignty, and submits to his government and way of salvation.

Though man be so wicked that he will not yield till the mighty power of grace prevail with him, yet still we may truly say that he may be saved, if he will, on God's terms. His inability being moral, and lying in wilful wickedness, is no more excuse to him than it is to an adulterer that he cannot love his own wife, or to a malicious person that he cannot but hate his own brother: is he not so much the worse, and deserving of so much the sorer punishment? Sinners shall lay all the blame on their own wills in hell for ever. Hell is a rational torment by conscience, according to the nature of the rational subject. If sinners could but then say, It was God's fault, and not ours, it would quiet their consciences and ease their torments, and make hell, to them, to be no hell. But to remember their wilfulness, will feed the fire, and cause the worm of conscience "never to die."

All things must come to their perfection by degrees. The strongest man must first be a child. The greatest scholar must first begin with the alphabet. The tallest oak was once an acorn. This life is our infancy; and would we be perfect in the womb, or born at full stature? If our rest was here, most of God's providences must be useless. Should God lose the glory of his church's miraculous deliverances, and of the fall of his enemies, that men may have their happiness here? If we were all happy, innocent, and perfect, what use was there for the

glorious work of our sanctification, justification, and future salvation?—If we wanted nothing, we should not depend on God so closely, nor call upon him so earnestly. How little would he hear from us, if we had what we would have!

Alas! what is there in all the world to give us rest? They that have most of it have the greatest burden. They that set most by it, and rejoice most in it, do all cry out at last of its vanity and vexation. Men promise themselves a heaven upon earth; but when they come to enjoy it, it flies from them. He that has any regard to the works of the Lord, may easily see that the very end of them is to take down our idols, to make us weary of the world, and seek our rest in him. Where does he cross us most, but where we promise ourselves most content?

Christ will give the crown to none but the worthy. Are we fit for the crown before we have overcome? or for the prize before we have run the race? or to receive our penny before we have wrought in the vineyard? or to be rulers of ten cities before we have improved our ten talents? or to enter into the joy of our Lord before we have well done as good and faithful servants? God will not alter the course of justice, to give you rest before you have laboured, nor the crown of glory till you have overcome.

5

As they did not like to retain God in their knowledge...so God will abhor to retain them in his household.

Little does the world know what is the loss of that soul who loses God! What a dungeon would the earth be if it had lost the sun! what a loathsome carrion the body, if it had lost the soul! yet all these are nothing to the loss of God.

God suits men's employment to their natures. Your hearts, sinners, were never set upon God in your lives, never warmed with his love, never longed after the enjoyment of him; you had no delight in speaking or hearing of him; you had rather have continued on earth, if you

had known how, than to be interested in the glorious praises of God. Is it meet, then, that you should be members of the celestial choir?

It is one of the hardest things in the world to bring a wicked man to know that he is wicked, or to make him see himself in a state of wrath and condemnation. Though they may easily find, by their strangeness to the new birth, and their enmity to holiness, that they never were partakers of them; yet they as verily expect to see God and be saved, as if they were the most sanctified persons in the world.

A hard heart now makes heaven and hell seem but trifles. We have showed them everlasting glory and misery, and they are as men asleep; our words are as stones cast against a wall, which fly back in our faces. We talk of terrible things, but it is to dead men; we search the wounds, but they never feel it; we speak to rocks rather than to men; the earth will as soon tremble as they. But when these dead souls are revived, what passionate sensibility, what working affections, what pangs of horror, what depths of sorrow will there then be!

This also will be a most tormenting consideration, to remember for what they sold their eternal welfare. When they compare the value of the pleasures of sin with the value of "the recompense of reward," how will the vast disproportion astonish them! To think of the low delights of the flesh, or the applauding breath of mortals, or the possessing heaps of gold,—and then to think of everlasting glory. "This is all I had for my soul, my God, my hopes of blessedness!" It cannot possibly be expressed how these thoughts will tear his very heart. Then will he exclaim against his folly: "O miserable wretch! Did I set my soul to sale for so base a price? Did I part with my God for a little dirt and dross; and sell my Savion, as Judas, for a little silver? I had but a dream of delight for my hopes of heaven; and, now I am awakened, it is all vanished...O that sinners would think of this when they are swimming in the delights of the flesh, and studying how to be rich and honourable in the world! When they are desperately venturing up on known transgression, and sinning against the checks of conscience!

The wound in their consciences will be yet deeper, when they shall not only remember it was their own doing, but that they were at so much cost and pains for their own damnation. What great undertakings did they engage in to effect their ruin; to resist the Spirit of God; to overcome the power of mercies, judgments, and even the word of God; to subdue the power of reason and silence conscience! All this they undertook and performed. Though they walked in continual danger of the wrath of God, and knew he could lay them in the dust, and cast them into hell in a moment; yet would they run upon all this. O the labor it costs sinners to be damned!

6

As true faith is the leading grace in the regenerate, so is false faith the leading vice in the unregenerate. Why do such multitudes sit still when they might have pardon, but that they verily think they are pardoned already? If you could ask thousands in hell, what madness brought them thither? they would most of them answer, “We thought we were sure of being saved till we found ourselves damned. We would have been more earnest seekers of regeneration and the power of godliness, but we verily thought we were Christians already. We have flattered ourselves into these torments, and now there is no remedy.”

I must in faithfulness tell thee that the confident belief of their good state, which the careless, unholy, unhumiliated multitude so commonly boast of; will prove in the end but a soul-damning delusion. There is none of this believing in hell. It was Satan’s stratagem, that being blindfold, they might follow him the more boldly; but then he will uncover their eyes, and they shall see where they are.

Methinks it is the most pitiable sight this world affords, to see such an ungodly person dying, and to think of his soul and his hopes departing together. With what a sad change he appears in another world! Then if a man could but ask that hopeless soul, “Are you as confident of salvation as you were wont to be?” what a sad answer would be returned! O that careless sinners would be awakened to think of this in time! Reader, rest not till thou canst give a reason of all thy hopes, grounded upon Scripture promises: that they purify thy

heart; that they quicken thy endeavours in godliness; that the more thou hopest the less thou sinnest, and the more exact is thy obedience.

There is nothing in the world more likely to keep thy soul out of heaven than thy false hopes of being saved, while thou art out of the way to salvation.

O that sinners would now remember and say, "Will these delights accompany us into the other world? Will not the remembrance of them be then our torment?"

7

Their cold and heartless prayers invite God to a denial: for among men it is taken for granted, that he who asks but slightly and seldom, cares not much for what he asks. They judge themselves unworthy of heaven, who think it not worth their more constant and earnest requests.

If any hypocrite entertains the Gospel with joy, it is only in the surface of his soul; he never gives the seed any depth of earth: it changes his opinions, but never melts and new moulds his heart, nor sets up Christ there in full power and authority. As his religion lies most in opinion, so does his chief business and conversation. He is usually an ignorant, bold, conceited dealer in controversies, rather than a humble embracer of known truth with love and obedience. By his slighting the judgments and persons of others, and seldom talking with seriousness and humility of the great things of Christ, he shows his religion dwells in his brain, and not in his heart. The wind of temptation carries him away as a feather, because his heart is not established with Christ and grace.

Alas! what a disproportion is there between our light and heat, our profession and prosecution! Who makes such haste as if it were for heaven? How still we stand! how idly we work! how we talk, and jest, and trifle away our time! how deceitfully we perform the work of God! how we hear, as if we heard not! and pray, as if we prayed not! and examine, and meditate, and reprove sin, as if we did it not! and enjoy Christ, as if we enjoyed him not!

What a frozen stupidity has benumbed us! We are dying, and we know it, and yet we stir not; we are at the door of eternal happiness or misery, and yet we perceive it not; death knocks, and we hear it not; God and Christ call and cry to us.

Where is the man that is in earnest a Christian? Methinks men everywhere make but a trifle of their eternal state. They look after it but a little by the by; they do not make it the business of their lives. If I were not sick myself of the same disease, with what tears should I mix this ink! with what groans should I express these complaints! and with what heart-grief should I mourn over this universal deadness!

Do we cry out of men's disobedience to the Gospel "in the demonstration of the Spirit," and deal with sin as the destroying fire in our towns, and by force pull men out of it?

How gently do we handle those sins which will so cruelly handle our people's souls! In a word, our want of seriousness about the things of heaven, charms the souls of men into formality, and brings them to this customary careless hearing, which undoes them. May the Lord pardon the great sin of the ministry in this thing.

Ask conscience, and suffer it to tell thee truly. Hast thou set thy eternal rest before thine eyes, as the great business thou hast to do in this world? Hast thou watched and laboured with all thy might, "that no man take thy crown?" Hast thou made haste, lest thou shouldst come too late, and die before thy work be done? Hast thou pressed on, through crowds of opposition...shake off thy sloth, and put to all thy strength, and be a Christian indeed.

The ends of a Christian's desire and endeavours are so great that no human understanding can comprehend them. What is so excellent, so important, or so necessary as the glorifying of God, the salvation of our own and other men's souls, by escaping the torments of hell, and possessing the glory of heaven? And can a man be too much affected with things of such moment? Can he desire them too earnestly, or love them too strongly, or labour for them too diligently? Do not we know, that if our prayers prevail not, and our labour succeeds not, we are undone for ever?

If the blood of the Son of God be mercy, then we are engaged to God by mercy. Shall God think nothing too much nor too good for us; and shall we think all too much that we do for him? When I compare my slow and unprofitable life with the frequent and wonderful mercies received, it shames me, it silences me, and leaves me inexcusable.

How will the hard labour and daily toil which servants undergo to please their masters, judge and condemn those who will not labour so hard for their great Master?

If you loved God, you would think nothing too much that you could possibly do to serve him and please him. Love is quick and impatient, active and observant. If you loved Christ, you would keep his commandments, nor accuse them of too much strictness. If you had faith, it would quicken and encourage you. If you had the hope of glory, it would, as the spring in the watch, set all the wheels of your souls a-going. If you had the fear of God, it would rouse you out of your slothfulness. If you had zeal, it would inflame, and “eat you up.” In what degree so ever thou art sanctified, in the same degree thou wilt be serious and laborious in the work of God.

Heaven itself is often lost for want of striving, but is never had on easier terms.

The sovereign wisdom of God has made striving necessary to salvation. Who knows the way to heaven better than the God of heaven? When men tell us we are too strict, whom do they accuse, God or us?

Let the world, the flesh, or the devil speak against a holy, laborious life, this is my answer, God hath commanded it. Nay, there never was, nor ever will be, a man but will approve such a life, and will one day justify the diligence of the saints. And who would not go that way which every man shall finally applaud? True, it is now “a way everywhere spoken against.” But let me tell you, most that speak against it, in their judgments approve of it; and those that are now against it, will shortly be of another mind. If they come to heaven, their mind must be changed before they come there. If they go to hell, their judgment will then be altered whether they will or not.

It is for want of diligence that heaven itself is lost...How far hath many a man followed Christ, and yet forsaken him when all worldly interests and hopes were to be renounced! God hath resolve that heaven shall not be had on easier terms. Rest must always follow labour...If thou art not serious, thou art not a Christian. It is not only a high degree in Christianity, but the very life and essence of it. As fencers upon a stage differ from soldiers fighting for their lives, so hypocrites differ from serious Christians. If men could be saved without this serious diligence, they would never regard it; all the excellencies of God's ways would never entice them.

Is it time, then, to trifle with God? Jesus Christ was serious in purchasing our redemption. In teaching, he neglected his meat and drink: in prayer, he continued all night: in doing good, his friends thought him beside himself: in suffering, he fasted forty days, was tempted, betrayed, spit upon, buffeted, crowned with thorns, sweat drops of blood, was crucified, pierced, died. There was no jesting in all this. And should we not be serious in seeking our own salvation?

The servants of the world and the devil are serious and diligent. They work as if they could never do enough: they make haste, as if afraid of coming to hell too late: they bear down ministers, sermons, and all before them. And shall they be more diligent for damnation than thou for salvation? Hast thou not a better Master, sweeter employment, greater encouragements, and a better reward?

8

When the Lord has so fully opened the blessedness of that kingdom which none but obedient believers shall possess; and so fully expressed those torments which the rest of the world must eternally suffer; methinks they that believe this to be certainly true, should never be at any quiet in themselves, till they are fully assured of their being heirs of the kingdom. Lord, what a strange madness is this, that men, who know they must presently enter upon unchangeable joy or pain, should yet live as uncertain what shall be their doom as if they had never heard of any such state; yea, and live as quietly and merrily in this uncertainty as if all were made sure, and there were no danger...If you ask of most men "a

reason of the hope that is in them," they will say, "Because God is merciful, and Christ died for sinners," and the like general reasons, which any man in the world may give as well as they, but put them to prove their interest in Christ and in the saving mercy of God, and they can say nothing to the purpose.

What do thy expressions discover but a wilful neglect of thy own salvation? as a ship-master that should let his vessel alone, and say, "I will venture it among the rocks, and waves, and winds; I will trust God with it; it will speed as well as other vessels." What horrible abuse of God is this, to pretend to trust God, to cloak their own wilful negligence! If thou didst really trust God, thou wouldst also be ruled by him, and trust him in his own appointed way.

Satan knows how to angle for souls better than to show them the hook and line or fright them away with a noise, or with his own appearance. Therefore he labours to keep them from a searching ministry or to keep the minister from helping them to search or to take off the edge of the word, that it may not pierce and divide; or to turn away their thoughts; or to possess them with prejudice.

God doth scarcely ever open the eyes of a poor sinner to see that his way is wrong, but presently there is a multitude of Satan's apostles ready to deceive and settle him again in the quiet possession of his former master...O, how many thousands have such charms kept asleep in deceit and security till death and hell have awakened them! The Lord calls to the sinner, and tells him, "The gate is strait, the way is narrow, and few find it; try and examine yourself; give diligence to make sure." The world cries, "Never doubt, never trouble yourself with these thoughts."

Most Christians content themselves with a small measure of grace, and do not follow on to spiritual strength and manhood. The chief remedy for such would be to follow on in duty till their graces be increased. Wait upon God in the use of his prescribed means, and he will undoubtedly bless you with increase.

The trouble of souls is also increased by their not knowing the ordinary way of God's conveying comfort. They think they have nothing to do but to wait when God will bestow it.

But they must know that the matter of their comfort is in the promises, and thence they must draw it as often as they expect it, by daily and diligently meditating upon the promises; and in this way they may expect the Spirit will communicate comfort to their souls.

The way of painful duty is the way of fullest comfort. Peace and comfort are Christ's great encouragements to faithfulness and obedience; and therefore, though our obedience does not merit them, yet they usually rise and fall with our diligence in duty.

As prayer must have faith and fervency to procure it success, besides the blood and intercession of Christ, so must all other parts of our obedience. If thou growest seldom, and formal, and cold in duty, especially in thy secret prayers to God, and yet findest no abatement in thy joys, I cannot but fear thy joys are either carnal or diabolical. Besides, grace is never apparent and sensible to the soul but while it is in action; therefore want of action must cause want of assurance.

The soul that is best furnished with grace, when it is not in action, is like a lute well stringed and tuned, which, while it lieth still, maketh no more music than a common piece of wood; but when it is handled by a skilful musician the melody is delightful.

Some degree of comfort follows every good action, as heat accompanies fire, and as beams and influence issue from the sun. A man that is cold should labour till heat be excited; so he that wants assurance must not stand still, but exercise his graces till his doubts vanish.

He that makes not God his chief good and ultimate end, is in heart a pagan and a vile idolater. Let me ask, then, dost thou truly account it thy chief happiness to enjoy the Lord in glory, or dost thou not? Canst thou say, "The Lord is my portion? Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee?" If thou be an heir of rest, it is thus with thee. Though the flesh will be pleading for its own delights, and the world will be creeping into thine affections, yet in thy ordinary, settled, prevailing judgment and affections, thou preferrest God before all things in the world. Thou makest him the very end of thy desires and endeavours.

The very reason why thou hearest, and prayest, and desirest to live on earth, is chiefly this, that thou mayest seek the Lord, and make sure of thy rest. Though thou dost not seek it so zealously as thou shouldst, yet it hath the chief of thy desires and endeavours, so that nothing else is desired or preferred before it. Thou wilt think no labour or suffering too great to obtain it. And though the flesh may sometimes shrink, yet thou art resolved and ready to go through all. Thy esteem for it will also be so high, and thy affection to it so great, that thou wouldst not exchange thy title to it, and hopes of it, for any worldly good whatsoever. If God should set before thee an eternity of earthly pleasure on the one hand, and the saints' rest on the other, and bid thee take thy choice, thou wouldst refuse the world and choose this rest. But if thou art yet unsanctified, then thou dost in thy heart prefer thy worldly happiness before God; and though thy tongue may say that God is thy chief good, yet thy heart doth not so esteem him. For the world is the chief end of thy desires and endeavours. Thy very heart is set upon it. Thy greatest care and labor is to maintain thy credit or fleshly delights. But the life to come hath little of thy care or labour. Thou didst never perceive so much excellency in the unseen glory of another world, as to draw thy heart after it, and bring thee to labour heartily for it. The little pains thou bestowest for it is but a secondary effort.

Art thou also content to take him for thy only Lord and King, to govern and guide thee by his laws and Spirit, and to obey him even when he commandeth the hardest duties, and those which most cross the desires of the flesh? Is it thy sorrow when thou breakest thy resolution herein; and thy joy when thou keepest closest in obedience to him? Wouldst thou not change thy Lord and Master for all the world? Thus is it with every true Christian. But if thou be a hypocrite, it is far otherwise. Thou mayest call Christ thy Lord and thy Savion, but thou never foundest thyself so lost without him as to drive thee to seek him, and trust him, and lay thy salvation on him alone; at least, thou didst never heartily consent that he should govern thee as thy Lord, nor resign thy soul and life to be ruled by him, nor take his word for the law of thy thoughts and actions.

Doubtless thou art willing to be saved from hell by Christ when thou diest; but, in the meantime, he must command thee no further than will consist with thy credit, or pleasure, or other worldly ends! And if he would give thee leave, thou hadst far rather live after the

world and the flesh, than after the Word and the Spirit...Thou art therefore no true believer in Christ; for though thou confess him in words, yet in works thou dost deny him, "being abominable and disobedient, an unto every good work reprobate." This is the case of those that shall be shut out of the saints' rest.

On the whole, if Christians would have comforts that will not deceive them, let them make it the great labour of their lives to grow in grace, to strengthen and advance the interest of Christ in their souls, and to weaken and subdue the interest of the flesh. Deceive not yourselves with a persuasion that Christ hath done all, and left you nothing to do. To overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil, and, in order to that, to stand always armed upon our watch, and valiantly and patiently to fight it out, is of great importance to our assurance and salvation.

9

Do it speedily. As you would not have them delay their return (to Christ), do not you delay to seek their return. While you are purposing to teach and help him, the man goes deeper in debt; wrath is heaping up; sin taking root; custom fastens him; temptations to sin multiply; conscience grows seared; the heart hardened; the devil rules; Christ is shut out; the Spirit is resisted; God is daily dishonoured; his law violated; he is robbed of that service which he should have; time runs on; death and judgment are at the door; and what if the man die, and drop into hell, while you are purposing to prevent it!

The great day will be terrible; time runs on; your life is uncertain; you are far behindhand; your case is dangerous; if you die tomorrow, how unready are you! With what terror will your soul leave the body! And do you yet loiter? Consider, God is all this while waiting your leisure: his patience beareth: his long-suffering forbeareth: his mercy entreateth you: Christ offereth you his blood and merits: the Spirit is persuading: conscience is accusing: Satan waits to have you. This is your time now or never. Had you rather burn in hell than repent on earth? have devils your tormentors, than Christ your governor? Will you renounce your part in God and glory, rather than renounce your sins?

Alas! it is not a few dull words between jest and earnest, between sleeping and waking, that will rouse a dead-hearted sinner. If a house be on fire you will not make a cold oration on the nature and danger of fire, but will run and cry, Fire! fire! To tell a man of his sins as softly as Eli did his sons; or to reprove him as gently as Jehoshaphat did Ahab; "Let not the king say so;" usually does as much harm as good. Loathness to displease men makes us undo them.

The fire is not always brought out of the flint at one stroke; nor men's affections kindled at the first exhortation: and if they were, yet if they be not followed they will soon grow cold again. Follow sinners with your loving and earnest entreaties, and give them no rest in their sin. This is true charity, the way to save men's souls, and will afford you comfort upon review.

Let them see in your life that superiority to the world which your lips recommend. Let them see, by your constant labours for heaven, that you indeed believe what you would have them believe. A holy and heavenly life is a continual sting to the consciences of sinners around you, and continually solicits them to change their course.

Did we verily believe that all the unregenerate and unholy shall be eternally tormented, how could you refrain from speaking, or avoid bursting into tears, when we look them in the face, especially when they are our near and dear friends? Thus doth secret unbelief consume the vigour of each grace and duty. O Christian, if you did verily believe that your ungodly neighbours, wife, husband, or child, should certainly lie for ever in hell, except they be thoroughly changed before death shall snatch them away, would not this make you address them day and night till they were persuaded? Were it not for this cursed unbelief, our own and our neighbour's souls would gain more by us than they do.

You will pray to God for them, to open their eyes and turn their hearts; and why not endeavour their conversion, if you desire it? And if you do not desire it, why do you ask it? Why do you not pray them to consider and return, as well as pray to God to convert and turn them? If you should see your neighbour fallen into a pit, and should pray God to help him out, but neither put forth your hand to help him, nor once direct him to help himself,

would not any man censure you for your cruelty and hypocrisy? It is as true of the soul as of the body.

We are also hindered by a base, man-pleasing disposition. We are so desirous to keep in credit and favour with men, that it makes us most unreasonably neglect our own duty. He is a foolish and unfaithful physician that will let a sick man die for fear of troubling him.

Suffer any thing, rather than the Gospel and men's souls should suffer.

Good laws will not reform us, if reformation begin not at home. This is the cause of all our miseries in the church and the state, even the want of a holy education of children.

10

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...If our dear Lord did not put these thorns under our head, we should sleep out our lives and lose our glory.

Many thousand recovered sinners may cry, "O healthful 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.

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.

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?"

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 loath to come to!... 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!

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?... 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!

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?

11

A heavenly mind is the nearest and truest way to a life of comfort. The countries far north are cold and frozen, because they are distant from the sun. What makes such frozen, uncomfortable Christians, but their living so far from heaven? And what makes others so warm in comforts, but their living higher, and having nearer access to God?

As you would delight a covetous man by showing him gold, so God delights his people by leading them, as it were, into heaven, and showing them himself and their rest with him.

He does not kindle our joys while we are idle, or taken up with other things. He gives the fruits of the earth, while we plough, and sow, and weed, and water, and dress, and with patience expect his blessing; so doth he give the joys of the soul.

The men of the world that dwell below, and know no other conversation but earthly, no wonder if their "understanding be darkened," and Satan "take them captive at his will." How can worms and moles see, whose dwelling is always in the earth? While this dust is in their eyes, no wonder they mistake gain for godliness, sin for grace, the world for God, their own wills for the law of Christ, and, in the issue, hell for heaven. But when a Christian withdraws himself from his worldly thoughts, and begins to converse with God in heaven, methinks he is, as Nebuchadnezzar, taken from the beasts of the field to the throne, and "his reason returneth unto him." When he has had a glimpse of eternity, and looks down on

the world again, how doth he charge with folly his neglects of Christ, his fleshly pleasures, his earthly cares!

A heavenly mind is also fortified against temptations, because the affections are thoroughly prepossessed with the high delights of another world. He that loves most, and not he that only knows most, will most easily resist the motions of sin...O, if we could keep the taste of our souls continually delighted with the sweetness above, with what disdain should we spit out the baits of sin!

The heavenly Christian is the lively Christian. It is our strangeness to heaven that makes us so dull. How will the soldier hazard his life, and the mariner pass through storms and waves, and no difficulty keep them back, when they think of an uncertain, perishing treasure! What life, then, would it put into a Christian's endeavours, if he would frequently think of is everlasting treasure! We run so slowly, and strive so lazily, because we so little mind the prize. Observe but the man who is much in heaven, and you shall see he is not like other Christians; something of what he hath seen above appeareth in all his duty and conversation.

The martyrs find more rest in their flames than their persecutors in their pomp and tyranny; because they foresee the flames they escape, and the rest to which their fiery chariot is conveying them. If the Son of God wilt walk with us, we are safe in the midst of those flames which shall devour them that cast us in.

No man so highly honoureth God, as he whose conversation is in heaven. Is not a parent dishonoured when his children feed on husks, are clothed with rags, and keep company with none but rogues and beggars? And is not our heavenly Father, when we, who call ourselves his children, feed on earth, and the garb of our souls is like that of the world; and our hearts familiarly converse with and "cleave to the dust," rather than stand continually in our Father's presence?

An earthly mind is another hindrance carefully to be avoided. God and mammon, earth and heaven cannot both have the delight of thy heart. When the heavenly believer is blessing himself in his God, and rejoicing in hope of the glory to come; perhaps thou art blessing thyself in thy worldly prosperity, and rejoicing in hope of thy thriving here. When he is comforting his soul in the views of Christ, of angels and saints, whom he shall live with for ever; then thou art comforting thyself with thy wealth, in looking over thy bills and bonds, thy goods, thy cattle, or thy buildings; and in thinking of the favour of the great, of the pleasure of a plentiful estate, of larger provisions for thy children after thee, of the advancement of thy family, or the increase of thy dependants. If Christ pronounced him a fool that said, "Soul, take thy ease; thou hast much goods laid up for many years;" how much more so art thou, who, knowingly, speakest in thy heart the same words! Tell, what difference between this fool's expressions and thy affections?

O the cursed madness of many that seem to be religious! They thrust themselves into a multitude of employments, till they are so loaded with labours and clogged with cares, that their souls are as unfit to converse with God, as a man to walk with a mountain on his back; and as unapt to soar in meditation, as their bodies to leap above the sun! And when they have lost that heaven upon earth which they might have had, they take up with a few rotten arguments to prove it lawful; though, indeed, they cannot.

What will it advantage thee in a divine life, to hear how the market goes, or what the weather is, or is likely to be, or what news is stirring? This is the discourse of earthly men...Yet this, for the most part, is the sweetest discourse thou art like to have from a formal, speculative, dead-hearted professor. Nay, if thou hadst been newly warming thy heart in the contemplation of the blessed joys above, would not this discourse benumb thy affections and quickly freeze thy heart again? I appeal to the judgment of any man that hath tried it, and maketh observations on the frame of his spirit. Men cannot well talk of one thing and mind another, especially things of such different natures.

Dost thou desire to have all men's eyes upon thee, and to hear them say, "This is he?" Art thou unacquainted with the deceitfulness and wickedness of thy heart? Art thou more ready to defend thy innocence, than accuse thyself, or confess thy fault? Canst thou hardly bear a

close reproof, or digest plain dealing? If these symptoms be undeniably in thy heart, thou art a proud person. There is too much of hell abiding in thee, to have any acquaintance with heaven; thy soul is too like the devil, to have any familiarity with God a proud man makes himself his god, and sets up himself as his idol; how, then, can his affections be set on God? how can he possibly have his heart in heaven? Invention and memory may possibly furnish his tongue with humble and heavenly expressions, but in his spirit there is no more heaven than there is humility. I speak the more of it, because it is the most common and dangerous sin in morality, and most promotes the great sin of infidelity.

A slothful spirit is another impediment to this heavenly life. And I verily think there is nothing hinders it more than this in men of a good understanding. If it were only the exercise of the body, the moving of the lips, the bending of the knee, men would as commonly step to heaven as they go to visit a friend. But to separate our thoughts and affections from the world, to draw forth all our graces, and increase each in its proper object, and hold them to it till the work prospers in our hands; this, this is the difficulty. Reader, heaven is above thee, and dost thou think to travel this steep ascent without labour and resolution?

13

Supposing thee to be a Christian, I am now exhorting thee to be an active Christian. And it is the work of the soul I am setting thee to, for bodily exercise here profiteth little.

Be sure to enter upon this work with the greatest solemnity of heart and mind. There is no trifling in holy things.

None on earth live such a life of joy and blessedness as those who are acquainted with this heavenly conversation. The joys of all other men are but like a child's plaything, a fool's laughter, or a sick man's dream of health. He that trades for heaven is the only gainer, and he that neglects it is the only loser. How seriously, therefore, should this work be done!

14

