

Rest of the Saints

by Charles Finney

The rest spoken of in the text is a state of rest from controversy with God and cessation from our own works, which we enter into by faith.

Scripture: Matthew 11:28, Hebrews 4:3

Topics: "Faith", "Rest in Christ"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the concept of 'rest' for believers as a state of faith and trust in Christ, distinct from inactivity or the ultimate rest of heaven. He explains that this rest involves ceasing from personal works and self-reliance, allowing Christ to be the source of righteousness and strength. Finney asserts that this rest is available in this life through faith, which liberates believers from the burdens of sin and self-effort. He warns that unbelief is the root of all sin, as it leads individuals away from reliance on God. Ultimately, entering this rest means yielding oneself completely to Christ, resulting in a life of love and service empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Transcript

TEXT.--For we which have believed do enter into rest.-- Heb. iv. 3.

THE following is the course of thought to which I wish to direct your attention this evening:

I. I shall endeavor to show what is not the rest here spoken of.

II. Show what it is.

III. Show when we are to enter into this rest.

IV. Show how to come into possession of this rest.

V. Show that all sin consists in or is caused by unbelief.

I. I will endeavor to show what is not the rest spoken of in the text.

1. It is evidently not a state of inactivity in religion, that is spoken of in the text under the name of rest.

The apostle who wrote this was very far from being himself inactive in religion, or from encouraging it in others. Those of whom he spoke, including himself, where he says, "WE who have believed, do enter into

rest," would know at once that it was not true, that they had entered into the rest of supineness.

2. Neither are we to understand that the perfect rest of heaven, is the rest here spoken of.

He speaks of it as a present state, "we DO enter," which was not consistent with the idea that heaven is the rest here spoken of. The perfect rest of heaven includes an absolute freedom from all pains, trials, sufferings and temptations of this life.--The rest of the believer here, may be of the same nature, substantially, with the rest in heaven. It is that rest begun on earth. But it is not made perfect. It differs in some respects, because it does not imply a deliverance from all trials, pains, sickness, and death. The apostles and primitive Christians had not escaped these trials, but still suffered their full share of them.

II. I will show what we are to understand by the rest here spoken of.

1. It is rest from controversy with God.

In this sense of cessation from controversy, the word rest, is often used in the Bible. In the context, it is said the children of Israel rested, when they were freed from their enemies. It is cessation from strife or war. Those who enter into this rest cease from their warfare with God, from their struggle against the truth, their war with their own conscience. The reproaches of conscience, that kept them in agitation, the slavish fears of the wrath of God under which men exert themselves as slaves in building up their own works, all are done away. They rest.

2. It implies cessation from our own works.

(1.) Cessation from works performed for ourselves.

Much of the apparent religion there is in the world is made up of works done by people which are their own, in this sense. They are working for their own lives--that is, they have this end in view, and are working for themselves, as absolutely as the man who is laboring for his bread. If the object of what you do in religion be, that you may be saved, it matters not whether it is from temporal or eternal ruin, it is for yourself, and you have not ceased from your own works, but are still multiplying works of your own. Now, the rest spoken of in the text, is entire cessation from all this kind of works.--The apostle, in verse 10th, affirms this: "He that is entered into his rest, hath ceased from his own works." And in the text, he says, "We that believe do enter," or have entered, "into rest." It is plain that this rest is ceasing from our own works. Not ceasing from all kind of works, for that is true neither of the saints on earth nor of saints in heaven. We have no reason to believe that any saint or angel, or that God Himself, or any holy being is ever inactive. But we cease to perform works with any such design as merely to save our own souls. It is ceasing to work for ourselves, that we may work for God. We are performing our own works, just as long as the supreme object of our works is to be saved. But if the question of our own salvation is thrown entirely on Jesus Christ, and our works are performed out of love to God, they are not our own works.

(2.) In entering into this rest, we cease from all works performed from ourselves, as well as works performed for ourselves.

Works are from ourselves, when they result from the simple, natural principles of human nature, such as conscience, hope, fear, &c., without the influences of the Holy Ghost. Such works are universally and wholly sinful. They are the efforts of selfishness, under the direction of mere natural principles.--His conscience convicts him, hope and fear come in aid, and under this influence, the carnal, selfish mind acts. Such acts cannot but be wholly sinful. It is nothing but selfishness.--Multiply the forms of selfishness

by selfishness forever, and it will never come to love. Where there is nothing but natural conscience pointing out the guilt and danger, and the constitutional susceptibilities of hope and fear leading to do something, it comes to nothing but the natural workings of an unsanctified mind. Such works are always the works of the flesh, and not the works of the Spirit. To enter into rest is to cease from all these, and no more to perform works from ourselves than for ourselves. Who does not know what a painful time those have, who set about religion from themselves; painfully grinding out about so much religion a month, constrained by hope and fear, and lashed up to the work by conscience, but without the least impulse from that divine principle of the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost? All such works are just as much from themselves, as any work of any devil is. No matter what kind of works are performed, if the love of God is not the mainspring and life and heart of them, they are our own works, and there is no such thing as rest in them. We must cease from them, because they set aside the gospel. The individual, who is actuated by these principles, sets aside the gospel, in whole or in part. If he is actuated only by these considerations, he sets aside the gospel entirely. And just so far as he is influenced by them, he refuses to receive Christ as his Savior in that relation. Christ is offered as a complete Savior, as our Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption. And just so far as any one is making efforts to dispense with a Savior in any of these particulars, he is setting aside the gospel for so much.

(3.) To enter into rest implies that we cease from doing any thing for ourselves.

We are not so much as to eat or drink for ourselves; "Whether, therefore, ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." The man who has entered into this rest, has ceased from doing it. God requires it, and he that has entered into rest has ceased to have any interest of his own. He has wholly merged his own interest in that of Christ. He has given himself so perfectly to Christ, that he has no work of his own to do. There is no reason why he should go about any work of his own. He knows he might as well sit still till he is in hell, as attempt anything of his own, as to any possibility of saving himself by any exertions of his own. When a man fully understands this, he ceases from making any efforts in this way. See the convicted sinner, how he will strain himself, and put forth all his efforts to help himself, until he learns that he is nothing; and then he ceases from all this, and throws himself helpless and lost, into the hands of Christ. Until he feels that he is in himself without strength, or help, or hope, for salvation or any thing that tends to it, he will never think of the simplicity of the gospel. No man applies to Christ for righteousness and strength, until he has used up his own, and feels that he is helpless and undone. Then he can understand the simplicity of the gospel plan, which consists in RECEIVING salvation, by faith, as a free gift. When he has done all that he could, in his own way, and finds that he has grown no better, that he is no nearer salvation, but rather grown worse, that sin is multiplied upon sin, and darkness heaped upon darkness, until he is crushed down with utter helplessness, then he ceases, and gives all up into the hand of Christ. See that sinner, trying to get into a agony of conviction, or trying to understand religion, and finding all dark as Egypt, and cannot see what it is that he must do. O, says he, what must I do? I am willing to do any thing. I can't tell why I don't submit, I know not how to do any thing more; what am I to do, or how shall I find out what is the difficulty? When he is fully convinced, then he turns his eyes to the Savior, and there he finds all he needs, Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption. Christ the Life of the world, the Light of the world, the Bread of life, and he needs nothing of all these but what is in Christ, that all he wants, and all he can ask, is in Christ, and to be received by faith; then he ceases from his own works, and throws himself at once and entirely upon Christ for salvation.

(4.) To cease from our own works is to cease attempting to do anything in our own strength.

Everyone who has entered into rest knows, that whatever he does in his own strength, will be an abomination to God. Unless Christ lives in him, unless God worketh in him, to will and to do, of his good pleasure, nothing is ever done acceptably to God. To set himself to do any thing in his own strength, independent of the Spirit of God, is forever an utter abomination to God. He who has not learned this, has not ceased from his own works, and has not accepted the Savior. The apostle says we are not able of ourselves to think any thing, as of ourselves. The depth of degradation to which sin has reduced us, is not understood until this is known and felt.

3. To enter into rest also includes the idea of throwing our burdens upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

He invites us to throw all our burdens and cares on him. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "Casting all your cares upon him, for he careth for you." These words mean just as they say. Whether your burden is temporal or spiritual, whether your care is for the soul or body, throw it all upon the Lord. See that little child, going along with his father; the father is carrying something that is heavy, and the child takes hold with its little hand to help, but what can he do towards carrying such a load? Many Christians make themselves a great deal of trouble, by trying to help the Lord Jesus Christ in his work. They weary and worry themselves with one thing and another, as if everything hung on their shoulders. Now, the Lord Jesus Christ is as much pledged to the believer for ALL that concerns him, as he is for his justification; and just as absolutely bound for his temporal as for his eternal interests. There is nothing that concerns the Christian, which he is not to cast on the Lord Jesus Christ. I do not mean to be understood, that the Christian has no agency in the matter. Here is a man who has cast his family upon Jesus Christ; but he has not done it in any such manner, that he is not to do any thing for his family. But he has so cast himself upon God, for direction, for light, for strength, for success, that he has yielded himself up absolutely to God, to guide and to sustain him; and Christ is pledged to see to it, that everything is done right.

4. To enter into rest is to make the Lord Jesus Christ our Wisdom, our Righteousness, our Sanctification, and our Redemption; and to receive him in all His offices, as a full and perfect substitute for all our own deficiencies.

We lack all these things, absolutely, and are to receive Him as a full and perfect substitute, to fill the vacancy, and supply all our needs. It is to cease expecting or hoping or attempting any thing of ourselves, to fill the vacancy; and receiving Christ as all.

5. Entering into this rest implies the yielding up of our powers so perfectly to his control, that henceforth all our works shall be his works.

I hope you will not understand any thing from this language, more mystical than the Bible. It is a maxim of the Common Law, that what a man does by another, he does by himself. Suppose I hire a man to commit murder; the deed is as absolutely my own as if I had done it with my own hand. The crime is not in the hand which struck the blow, any more than it is in the sword, that stabs the victim. The crime is in my mind. If I use another's hand, if my mind, as the moving cause, influenced him, it is my act still. Suppose that I had taken his hand by force, and used it to shoot my neighbour, would not that be my act? Certainly, but it was in my mind, and it is just as much my act, if I influence his mind to do it. Now apply this principle to the doctrine, that the individual who has entered into rest has so yielded himself up to Christ's control, that all his works are the works of Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul says, "I laboured more abundantly than they all; yet not I, but the grace of God in me." And he frequently insists upon it, that it was not himself that

did the works, but Christ in him. Do not misunderstand it now. It is not said, and is not to be so understood, that the believer acts upon compulsion, or that Christ acts in him without his own will, but that Christ by his spirit dwelling in him, influences and leads his mind that he acts voluntarily in such a way as to please God. When one ceases from his own works, he so perfectly gives up his own interest and his own will, and places himself so perfectly under the dominion and guidance of the Holy Spirit, that whatever he does is done by the impulse of the Spirit of Christ. The Apostle describes it exactly, when he says, "Work out your own salvation, with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you, to will and to do of his good pleasure." God influences the will, not by force but by love, to do just what will please him. If it was done by force, we should be no longer free agents. But it is love that so sweetly influences the will, and brings it entirely under the control of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is not that our agency is suspended, but is employed by the Lord Jesus Christ. Our hands, our feet, our powers of body and mind, are all employed to work for him. He does not suspend the laws of our constitution, but so directs our agency, that the love of Christ so constrains us, that we will and do of his good pleasure.

Thus you see, that all works that are really good in man, are, in an important sense, Christ's works. This is affirmed in the Bible, over and over again, that our good works are not from ourselves, nor in any way by our own agency without God, but God directs our agency, and influences our wills, to do his will, and we do it. They are in one sense our works, because we do them by our voluntary agency. Yet, in another sense they are his works, because he is the moving cause of all.

6. Entering into this rest implies, that insomuch as we yield our agency to Christ, insomuch we cease from sin.

If we are directed by the Lord Jesus Christ, he will not direct us to sin. Just as far as we give ourselves up to God we cease from sin. If we are controlled by him so that he works in us, it is to will and to do of his good pleasure. And just so far as we do this, so far we cease from sin. I need not spend time to prove this.

III. I am to inquire when they that believe do enter into rest.

It is in this life.

I. This appears from the text and context. The apostle in connection with the text, was reasoning with the Jews. He warns them to beware, lest they fail of entering into the true rest, which was typified by their fathers' entering into the land of Canaan. The Jews supposed that was the true rest. But the apostle argues with them, to show that there was a higher rest, of which the rest of temporal Canaan was only a type, and into which the Jews might have entered but for their unbelief. If Joshua had given them the real rest, he would not have spoken of another day. Yet another day is spoken of. Even so late as David's day, it is spoken of in the Psalms as yet to come: "To-day, after so long a time; as it is said, Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. For if Jesus (that is Joshua) had given them rest, then would he not afterwards have spoken of another day. There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God." He therefore argues, that the rest in Canaan was not the real rest which was promised, but was typical of the true rest. What then was the true rest? It was the rest of repose of faith in Christ or the gospel state, a cessation from our own works. And believers enter into that state by faith.

I know it is generally supposed that the rest here spoken of is the heavenly rest, beyond this life. But it is manifestly a rest that commences here. "We which believe DO enter into rest." It begins here, but extends

into eternity. It is the same in kind, but made there more perfect in degree, embracing freedom from the sorrows and trials to which all believers are subject in this life. But it is the same in kind, the rest of faith, the Sabbath-keeping of the soul when it ceases from its own works, and casts itself wholly upon the Savior.

2. It is manifest that this rest must commence in this world, if faith puts us in possession of it. This is the very point that the apostle was arguing, that faith is essential to taking possession of it. They "could not enter in because of unbelief." "Beware, lest ye fail of entering in after the same example of unbelief." He warns them not to indulge in unbelief, because by faith they may take immediate possession of the rest. If this rest by faith ever commences at all, it must be in this world.

3. The nature of the case proves this. Nothing short of this taking possession of rest is fully embracing Jesus Christ. It is a spiritual rest from the conflict with God, from the stings of conscience, and from efforts to help ourselves by any workings of our own mind. Nothing short of this is getting clear away from the law, or entering fully into the gospel.

IV. I am to show how we are to enter into this rest.

From what has already been said, you will understand that we take possession of it by faith.

The text, with the context, shows this. You will recollect also what the Lord Jesus Christ says, Matthew xi. 28,29-- "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls." Here this same rest is spoken of, and we are told that if we will only come to Christ, we may find it. If we will take his easy yoke, which is love, and trust him to bear all our burdens, we shall find rest. The Psalmist speaks of the same rest--"Return unto thy rest, O my soul." What Christian does not know what it is to have the soul rest in Christ, to hang upon his arm, and find rest from all the cares and perplexities and sorrows of life?

Again--It is evident that faith in Christ, from its own nature, brings the soul into the very state of rest which I have described. How instantly faith breaks up slavish fear, and brings the soul into the liberty of the gospel! How it sets us free from selfishness, and all those influences we formerly acted under! By faith we confide all to Christ, to lead us, and sanctify us, and justify us. And we may be just as certain to be led and to be sanctified, as we are to be justified, if we only exercise faith and leave ourselves in the hands of Christ for all. As a simple matter of fact, such faith brings the soul into a state of rest. The soul sees that there is not need of its own selfish efforts, and no hope from them if they were needed. In itself, it is so far gone in sin that it is as hopeless as if it had been in hell a thousand years. Take the best Christian on earth, and let the Lord Jesus Christ leave his soul, and where is he? Will he pray, or do any thing good, or acceptable to God, without Christ! Never. The greatest saint on earth will go right off into sin in a moment, if abandoned by Jesus Christ. But faith throws all upon Christ, and that is rest.

Again: Faith makes us cease from all works for ourselves. By faith we see, that we have no more need of doing works for ourselves, than the child needs to work for his daily bread, whose father is worth millions. He may work, from love to his father, or from love to the employment, but not from any necessity to labor for his daily bread. The soul that truly understands the gospel, sees perfectly well that there is no need of mingling his own righteousness with the righteousness of Christ, or his own wisdom with the wisdom of Christ, or his own sufferings with the sufferings of Christ. If there was any need of this, there would be just so much temptation to selfishness, and to working from legal motives. But there is none.

Again: By faith the soul ceases from all works performed from itself. Faith brings a new principle into action, entirely above all considerations addressed to the natural principles, of hope and fear and conscience. Faith brings the mind under the influence of love. It takes the soul out from the influences of conscience, lashing it up to duty, and brings it under the influence of the same holy, heavenly principles, that influenced Christ himself.

Again: Faith brings the mind into rest, inasmuch as it brings it to cease from all efforts merely for its own salvation, and puts the whole being into the hands of Christ.

Faith is confidence. It is yielding up all our powers and interests to Christ, in confidence, to be led, and sanctified, and saved by him.

It annihilates selfishness, and thus leaves no motives for our own works.

In short: Faith is an absolute resting of the soul in Christ, for all that it needs, or can need. It is trusting him for everything. For instance--Here is a little child, wholly dependent on its father. Now, if the little child did not trust its father, it must be constantly miserable. It is absolutely dependent on its father, for house and home, food and raiment, and everything under the sun. Yet that little child feels no uneasiness, because it confides in its father. It rests in him, and gives itself no uneasiness, but that he will provide all that it needs. It is just as cheerful and happy, all the day long, as if it had all things in itself, because it has such confidence. Now the soul of the believer rests in Christ, just as the infant does on the arms of its mother. The penitent sinner, like a condemned wretch, hangs all on Christ, without the least help or hope, only as they come from Christ alone, and as Christ does all that is needed.

If faith does consist in thus trusting absolutely in Christ, then it is manifest, that this rest is taken possession of, when we believe; and that it must be in this life, if faith is to be exercised in this life.

V. I am to show that unbelief is the cause of all the sin there is in the world.

I do not mean to imply, by this, that unbelief is not itself a sin; but to say, that it is the fountain, out of which flows all other sin. Unbelief is distrust of God, or want of confidence. It is manifest that it was this want of confidence which constituted Adam's real crime. It was not the mere eating of the fruit, but the distrust which led to the outward act, that constituted the real crime, for which he was cast out of Paradise. That unbelief is the cause of all sin, is manifest from the following considerations:

The moment an individual wants faith, and is left to the simple influence of natural principles and appetites, he is left just like a beast, and the things that address his mind through the senses, alone influence him. The motives that influence the mind when it acts right, are discerned by faith. Where there is no faith, there are no motives before the mind, but such as are confined to this world. The soul is then left to its mere constitutional propensities, and gives itself up to the minding of the flesh. This is the natural and inevitable result of unbelief. The eye is shut to eternal things, and there is nothing before the mind, calculated to beget any other action but that which is selfish. It is therefore left to grovel in the dust, and can never rise above its own interest and appetites. It is a natural impossibility that the effect should not be so; for how can the mind act without motives? But the motives of eternity are seen only by faith. The mere mental and bodily appetites that terminate on this world, can never raise the mind above the things of this world, and the result is only sin, sin, sin, the minding of the flesh forever. The very moment Adam distrusted God, he was given up to follow his appetites. And it is so with all other minds.

Suppose a child loses all confidence in his father. He can henceforth render no hearty obedience. It is a natural impossibility. If he pretends to obey, it is only from selfishness, and not from the heart; for the mainspring and essence of all real hearty obedience is gone. It would be so in heaven, it is so in hell. Without faith it is impossible to please God. It is a natural impossibility to obey God in such a manner as to be accepted of him, without faith. Thus unbelief is shown to be the fountain of all the sin in earth and hell, and the soul that is destitute of faith, is just left to work out its own damnation.

REMARKS.

I. The rest which those who believe do enter into here on earth, is of the same nature with the heavenly rest.

The heavenly rest will be more complete; for it will be a rest from all the sorrows and trials to which even a perfect human soul is liable here. Even Christ himself experienced these trials and sorrows and temptations. But the soul that believes, rests as absolutely in him here, as in heaven.

II. We see why faith is said to be the substance of things hoped for.

Faith is the very thing that makes heaven; and therefore it is the substance of heaven, and will be to all eternity.

III. We see what it is to be led by the Spirit of God.

It is to yield up all our powers and faculties to his control, so as to be influenced by the Spirit in all that we do.

IV. We see that perfect faith would produce perfect love, or perfect sanctification.

A perfect yielding up of ourselves, and continuing to trust all that we have and are to Christ, would make us perfectly holy.

V. We see that just as far as any individual is not sanctified, it is because his faith is weak.

When the Lord Jesus Christ was on earth, if his disciples fell into sin, he always reproached them with a want of faith: "O ye of little faith." A man that believes in Christ has no more right to expect to sin, than he has a right to expect to be damned. You may startle at this, but it is true.

You are to receive Christ as your sanctification, just as absolutely as for your justification. Now you are bound to expect to be damned, unless you receive Christ as your justification. But if you receive him as such, you have then no reason and no right to expect to be damned. Now, he is just as absolutely your sanctification, as your justification. If you depend upon him for sanctification, he will no more let you sin, than he will let you go to hell. And it is as unreasonable, and unscriptural and wicked, to expect one as the other. And nothing but unbelief, in any instance, is the cause of your sin. Some of you have read the life of Mrs. Hester Ann Rogers, and recollect how habitual it was with her, when any temptation assailed her, instantly to throw herself upon Christ. And she testifies, that in every instance he sustained her.

Take the case of Peter. When the disciples saw Christ walking upon the water, after their affright was over, Peter requested to be permitted to come to him on the water, and Christ told him to come; which was a promise on the part of Christ, that if he attempted it, he should be sustained. But for this promise, his attempt would have been tempting God. But with this promise, he had no reason and no right to doubt. He

made the attempt, and while he believed, the energy of Christ bore him up, as if he had been walking upon the ground. But as soon as he began to doubt, he began to sink. Just so it is with the soul; as soon as it begins to doubt the willingness and the power of Christ to sustain it in a state of perfect love, it begins to sink. Take Christ at his word, make him responsible, and rely on him, and heaven and earth will sooner fail than he will allow such a soul to fall into sin. Say, with Mrs. Rogers, when Satan comes with a temptation, "Lord Jesus, here is a temptation to sin, see thou to that."

VI. You see why the self-denying labors of saints are consistent with being in a state of rest.

These self-denying labors are all constrained by love, and have nothing in them that is compulsory or hard. Inward love draws them to duty. So far is it from being true, that the self-denying labors of Christians are hard work, that it would be vastly more painful to them NOT to do it. Their love for souls is such, that if they were forbidden to do any thing for them, they would be in agony. In fact, a state of inaction would be inconsistent with this rest. How could it be rest, for one whose heart was burning and bursting with love to God and to souls, to sit still and do nothing for them. But it is perfect rest for the soul to go out in prayer and effort for their salvation. Such a soul cannot rest, while God is dishonored and souls destroyed, and nothing done for their rescue. But when all his powers are used for the Lord Jesus Christ, this is true rest. Such is the rest enjoyed by angels, who cease not day nor night, and who are all ministering spirits, to minister to the heirs of salvation.

The apostle says, "Take heed, therefore, lest a promise being left of entering into rest, any of you should come short of it." And "Let us labor therefore, to enter into rest. Do any of you know what it is to come to Christ, and rest in him? Have you found rest, from all your own efforts to save yourselves, from the thunders of Sinai, and the stings of conscience? Can you rest sweetly in Jesus, and find in him every thing essential to sanctification and eternal salvation? Have you found actual salvation in him? If you have, then you have entered into rest. If you have not found this, it is because you are still laboring to perform your own works.

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