

Resting in Obedience

by Charles Finney

The sermon emphasizes the importance of ceasing from our own works and trusting in Jesus Christ for salvation, which is the essence of the rest of faith.

Scripture: Psalm 116:7, Matthew 6:30, Matthew 11:28, Mark 4:40, 1 Corinthians 10:31, Philippians 2:12-13, Hebrews 4:1-10, 1 Peter 5:7

Topics: "Faith", "Surrender to Christ"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the concept of 'resting in obedience' as a present state of faith where believers cease from their own works and rely entirely on Christ for salvation and guidance. He explains that this rest is not inactivity but a profound trust in God, allowing believers to work for Him out of love rather than selfish motives. Finney warns against the dangers of self-reliance and encourages believers to yield themselves completely to Jesus, who provides true rest and freedom from the burdens of sin and guilt. He highlights that faith is essential for entering this rest, which begins in this life and extends into eternity. Ultimately, Finney calls for a complete surrender to Christ, assuring that true rest is found in Him alone.

Transcript

"For we which have believed do enter into rest" --Hebrews 4:3.

The apostle who wrote this was very active in the Church. Those of whom he spoke, including himself-"we who have believed do enter into rest"-would know at once they had not entered into the rest of inactivity.

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." The perfect rest of heaven includes absolute freedom from all the 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. But that rest begun on earth is not made perfect. It differs because it does not deliver from all trials, pains, sickness, and death. The apostles and early Christians did not escape these trials but still suffered their full share of them.

The word rest is often used in the Bible. The children of Israel rested when they were freed from their enemies and strife of war. Those who enter into this rest cease from their warfare with God, their struggle against the truth, and their war with their own conscience. The reproaches of conscience that kept them in agitation and the slavish fears of the wrath of God are done away with. They rest.

CEASING FROM SELFISH WORKS

Much religion in the world is made up of people's own works. They are working for their own lives--that is, they are working for themselves as absolutely as the man laboring for his bread. If the object of your faith is your own salvation, it doesn't matter whether it is from temporal or eternal ruin, it is for yourself. You have not ceased from your own works but are still multiplying them.

The rest spoken of in the text is entire cessation from this kind of works. The apostle affirms this: "He that is entered into his rest, hath ceased from his own works" (Hebrews 4:10). And in the text, he says, "We that believe do enter," or have entered, "into rest."

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 the saints in heaven. We have no reason to believe that any saint, angel, or God Himself is ever inactive. But we cease to perform works merely to save our own souls. By ceasing to work for ourselves we can work for God. If the question of our salvation is thrown entirely on Jesus Christ and our works are performed out of love to God, they are not our own works.

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, etc., without the influences of the Holy Spirit. Such works are universally and wholly sinful. They are the efforts of selfishness, under the direction of mere natural principles. Our conscience convicts us, and hope and fear come to our aid. Under this influence, the carnal, selfish mind acts.

People who practice their own righteousness painfully grind out religion, constrained by hope and fear, lashed to the work by conscience. They haven't the least impulse from that divine principle of the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit. 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, life, and heart, then they are dead and provide no rest. These works set aside the gospel.

The individual who is actuated by these principles sets aside the gospel, in whole or in part. If he is motivated only by these considerations, he sets aside the gospel entirely. As 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 --our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. If anyone dispenses with the Savior in any of these functions, he is setting aside the gospel in proportion.

To enter into rest implies that we cease from doing anything for ourselves. We are not even to eat or drink for ourselves: "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31). 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. He might as well sit still until he is in hell as attempt to save himself by his own exertions. When a man fully understands this, he ceases from making any efforts in this way. The convicted sinner will strain to help himself until he learns that he is nothing. Then he ceases from all this and throws himself, helpless and lost, into the hands of Christ.

Until he feels that in himself he is without strength, help, or hope for salvation, 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 and finds that he is no nearer salvation and that sin is multiplied upon sin, he is crushed down with utter helplessness and gives all into the hand of Christ.

YIELDING YOURSELF TO JESUS

Everyone who has entered into rest knows that whatever he does in his own strength is an abomination to God. Unless Christ lives in him to will and to do His good pleasure, nothing is ever done acceptably to God. He who has not learned this has not ceased from his own works and has not accepted the Savior. The depth of depravity to which sin has reduced us is not understood until we know we are not able to work for ourselves.

Jesus 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" (Matthew 11:28). "Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you" (1 Peter 5:7).

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.

Imagine a little child walking with his father. The father is carrying something that is heavy, and the child takes hold with his little hand to help. But how can he carry such a load? Many Christians cause a great deal of trouble by trying to help the Lord in His work. They weary and worry themselves as if everything hung on their shoulders.

Jesus Christ is as much pledged to the believer for all that concerns him as He is for his justification. The Lord is as absolutely bound for his temporal as for his eternal interests. Everything that concerns the Christian can be cast on the Lord. I do not mean that the Christian has no responsibility in the matter. A man who has cast his family upon Jesus must still be concerned for his family. But he has cast himself upon God for direction, light, strength, and success. He has yielded himself up absolutely to God to guide and sustain him, and Christ will see that everything is done right.

Entering into Jesus' rest implies the yielding up of our powers so perfectly to His control that from that point all our works will be His works. I hope you will not understand anything from this language more mystical than the Bible intends. What a man does by another, he does himself. If 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 knife that stabs the victim. The crime is in my mind. Even if I use another's hand, my mind influenced him, and it is still my act.

Apply this principle to the doctrine that the individual who has entered into rest has yielded himself up to Christ's control, and all his works are the works of Jesus. The apostle Paul says, "I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Corinthians 15:10). He frequently insists that it was not himself that did the works but Christ in him.

Do not misunderstand it now. Do not think that the believer acts upon compulsion or that Christ acts in him without his own will. But Christ, by His Spirit dwelling in him, influences and leads his mind so that he acts voluntarily to please God.

When one ceases from his own works, he so perfectly gives up his own interest and will and places himself under the dominion and guidance of the Holy Spirit that whatever he does is done by the impulse

of the Spirit of Christ. Paul describes it exactly: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12-13).

God influences the will, not by force but by love, to do what will please Him. If it was done by force, we would no longer be free agents. But it is love that sweetly influences the will and brings it entirely under the control of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our free will isn't suspended but is employed by the Lord Jesus Christ. Our hands, feet, and powers of body and mind are all employed to work for Him. He does not suspend the laws of our constitution but directs us, and the love of Christ constrains us to will and do of His good pleasure.

All works that are really good in man are, in an important sense, Christ's works. Over and over the Bible affirms that our good words are not from ourselves or in any way by our own action without God. God directs us and influences our will to do His. They are in one sense our works, because we do them voluntarily. Yet, in another sense, they are His works because He is the moving cause of all.

Insomuch as we yield our will to Christ, to that degree we cease from sin. If we are directed by the Lord, 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.

THE TRUE REST OF FAITH

Believers enter into rest in this life. This appears from the text and context. The author of Hebrews, in connection with the text, was reasoning with the Jews. He warns them to beware unless they fail to enter into the true rest, typified by their fathers' entering into the land of Canaan. The Jews supposed that was the true rest. But the author argues that there was a higher rest of which the rest of temporal Canaan was only a type. The Jews might have entered this rest except 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 in 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, To day 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" (Hebrews 4:7-9).

He therefore argues that the rest in Canaan was not the real rest promised but was typical of the true rest. What then was the true rest? It was the rest of faith in Christ, a cessation from our own works. And believers enter into that state by faith.

Many people suppose that the rest spoken of is the heavenly rest beyond this life. But it is certainly a rest that begins here. "We which believe do enter into rest." It begins here but extends into eternity. There it will be 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 rest of faith, the Sabbath-keeping of the soul when it ceases from its own works and casts itself upon the Savior.

Faith is essential to taking possession of this rest. The author of Hebrews warns them not to indulge in unbelief, because by faith they may take immediate possession of the rest. If this rest by faith ever begins at all, it must be in this world. Jesus said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour 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" (Matthew 11:28-29). We are told that if we will only come to Christ, we will find rest. If

we will take His yoke of love and trust Him to bear all our burdens, we will find rest.

The psalmist speaks of the same rest: "Return unto thy rest, O my soul" (Psalm 116:7). What Christian does not know what it is to have peace in Christ and find rest from all the cares, perplexities, and sorrows of life?

Faith in Christ brings the soul into rest. Faith instantly breaks up slavish fear and brings the soul into the liberty of the gospel! It sets us free from selfishness and other influences we formerly acted under. By faith we confide in Christ to lead us, sanctify us, and justify us. The soul sees no need for its own selfish efforts. In itself, the soul 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--if the Lord leaves his soul, where is he? Will he pray or do anything good or acceptable to God without Christ? Never. The greatest saint on earth would immediately go right back into sin if abandoned by Jesus Christ. But faith throws all upon Christ, and that is rest.

PRINCIPLES OF FAITH

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 whose father is worth millions needs to work for his daily bread. He may work out of love to his father or love to his job, but not from any necessity to labor for his daily bread. The soul that truly understands the gospel sees no need of mingling his own righteousness with the righteousness of Christ, his 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 much temptation to selfishness and working from legal motives. But there is none.

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, fear, and conscience. Faith brings the mind under the influence of love. It takes the soul from under the influences of conscience and brings it under the influence of the same holy, heavenly principle that influenced Jesus Himself.

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

Faith is confidence, yielding up all our power and interests to Christ to be led, sanctified, and saved by Him. It annihilates selfishness and thus leaves no motives from our own works.

Faith is an absolute resting of the soul in Jesus for all that it needs or can need. It is trusting Him for everything. If a little child didn't trust his father, he would be miserable. He is absolutely dependent on his father for house, food, clothing, and everything under the sun. Yet that little child feels no uneasiness because he confides in his father. He rests in him and is sure he will provide. He is as cheerful and happy as if he had all things in himself because he has confidence.

The soul of the believer rests in Christ just as the infant does in the arms of its mother. The penitent sinner, like a condemned wretch, clings to Christ without the least help or hope. Only when he comes to Christ alone will He do all that is needed.

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

Unbelief is the cause of all the sin in the world. Unbelief, itself a sin, is the fountain out of which all other sin flows. It is distrust in God or a lack of confidence. This lack of confidence constituted Adam's real crime, not the mere eating of the fruit. The distrust that led to the outward act constituted the real crime, for which he was cast out of Paradise.

The moment an individual lacks faith and is left to the simple influence of natural principles and appetites, he is like a beast. The things that address his mind through the sense 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 except those confined to this world. The soul is then left to give itself up to the flesh.

This is the natural and inevitable result of unbelief. The eye is shut to eternal things, and nothing before the mind is calculated to beget anything but selfishness. Left to grovel in the dust, it can never rise above its own interest and appetites; for how can the mind act without motives? But the motives of eternity are seen only by faith. Mere mental and bodily appetites can never raise the mind above the things of this world, and the result is 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 now give no heartfelt obedience. If he pretends to obey, it is only from selfishness and not from the heart. The mainspring and essence of all loving obedience is gone. It will be so in heaven; it is so in hell. Without faith it is impossible to please God. We cannot obey God and be accepted by Him without faith. Unbelief is the foundation of all the sin in earth and hell, and the soul that is void of faith is left to work out its own damnation.

RESTING IN JESUS

Perfect faith would produce perfect love and perfect holiness, if we would yield ourselves up and trust all that we have and are to Christ. If an individual is not sanctified, his faith is weak.

When Jesus was on earth, if His disciples fell into sin, He always reproached them for a lack of faith: "O ye of little faith," (See Matthew 6:30, 8:26; Luke 12:28; Mark 4:40; etc.) 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 holiness just as absolutely as for your justification. You should expect to be damned unless you receive Christ as your justification. But if you receive Him, you have no reason and no right to expect to be damned. 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, unscriptural, and wicked to expect one as the other. Nothing but unbelief, in any instance, is the cause of your sin.

Take the case of Peter. When the disciples saw Jesus walking upon the water, Peter requested permission to come to Him on the water. Christ told him to come. Jesus' invitation was a promise that, if Peter attempted it, he would be sustained. Except 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, Jesus' energy bore him up. But as soon as he began to doubt, he began to sink.

As soon as the soul begins to doubt the willingness and the power of Christ to sustain it in a state of perfect love, it begins to sink. Take Jesus at His Word, make Him responsible, and rely on Him. Heaven

and earth will sooner pass away than He will ignore a soul falling into sin.

A state of inaction is inconsistent with Christian rest. How could it be rest for one whose heart was burning and bursting with love to God and to souls to sit and do nothing? But it is perfect rest for the soul to burn in prayer and effort for their salvation. Such a soul cannot rest while God is dishonored, souls destroyed, and nothing is 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 never cease, day or night, and who are all ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation.

"Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into rest, any of you should seem to come short of it" (Hebrews 4:1).

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 everything essential to holiness and eternal salvation in Him? 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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