

The Rest of Faith--No. 1

by Charles Finney

The rest of faith is a state of mind that feels no necessity for attempting anything in our own strength, and is characterized by a complete cessation from all our own selfish works and self-righteous efforts.

Scripture: Psalm 37:1, Hebrews 3:19 - 4:1

Topics: "Faith", "Spiritual Rest"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the significance of faith in entering God's rest, drawing parallels between the Israelites' failure to enter Canaan due to unbelief and the spiritual rest available to believers today. He explains that true rest is not about spiritual indolence or waiting for God to act without our involvement, but rather an active faith that relies on God's promises. Finney warns against misconceptions that prevent believers from experiencing this rest, such as misunderstanding its nature or believing it is unattainable in this life. He encourages immediate possession of this rest through faith, illustrating that it can be accessed at once by trusting in God's promises. The sermon serves as a call to recognize and overcome the barriers of unbelief that hinder spiritual fulfillment.

Transcript

Text. Heb. 3:19, & 4:1.--So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief. Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.

The following is the order in which I will direct your attention.

I. INQUIRE OF WHOM THE APOSTLE IS SPEAKING IN THIS TEXT, AND INTO WHAT IT IS SAID THEY COULD NOT ENTER.

II. WHY THEY COULD NOT ENTER IN.

III. SHOW THAT TEMPORAL CANAAN WAS TYPICAL OF THE REST OF FAITH.

IV. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN THIS REST.

V. HOW WE MAY SEEM TO COME SHORT OF IT.

VI. HOW WE MAY TAKE POSSESSION OF IT.

I. I am to inquire of whom the Apostle is speaking and into what they could not enter.

In this connexion the Apostle is speaking of the Jews; and that into which they could not enter was temporal Canaan, as is evident from the context.

II. Why they could not enter in.

It is asserted in the text, that they could not enter into Canaan, because of unbelief. The Jews had arrived upon the borders of the promised land. And Moses deputed a number of individuals as spies, and sent them to spy out the land. They went up and surveyed the land, and returned bringing some of the fruits of the land, and represented to the children of Israel, that it was an exceeding good land, but that it was impossible for them to take possession of it--that the towns and cities were walled up to heaven--that the country was inhabited by giants--and that therefore they were utterly unable to take possession of the land.

In this testimony all the spies agreed except Caleb and Joshua. This discouraged the people and produced a rebellion that prevented that generation from taking possession of Canaan. Their confidence in divine assistance was utterly shaken, and their unbelief prevented any such attempt to take possession of the land, as would otherwise have been made with complete success. The bringing up of the evil report, by those who were sent out to reconnoiter, and their failing to encourage and lead forward the people, were the means of that generation being turned back, and utterly wasted in the wilderness. God was so incensed against them for their want of confidence in his help, and of his ability, and willingness to give them possession, that he "swore in his wrath, that they should not enter into his rest."

III. Show that temporal Canaan was typical of the rest of faith.

It is plain from the context that the Apostle supposes the land of Canaan to have been typical of the rest of faith. The land of Canaan was to have been their rest after their perilous journey from Egypt. In this land they were to have been secure from the power of all their enemies round about. He concludes the third chapter of this epistle, by asserting that "they could not enter into this rest because of unbelief." And he begins the fourth chapter, by exhorting the Jews, to whom he was writing "to fear lest a promise being left them of entering into rest" [the rest of faith,] "any should seem to come short of it." And in the third verse he affirms, that "we who have believed do enter into rest."

IV. What is implied in this rest.

1. Not a state of spiritual indolence.

2. Not waiting for God to do his own work, and ours too. Some people seem to be waiting for God, and to have such an idea of his sovereignty as to throw upon him the responsibility of doing, not only that which belongs to him, but that also which belongs to themselves. They seem to forget that holiness in man is his own act, and talk as if God would make men holy without the proper and diligent exercise of their own powers. Others are waiting for God to convert their children, and their neighbors, and the world, without any instrumentality of theirs, affirming that God can, and will do his own work, in his own way, and in his own time. Thus entirely overlooking the fact, that when God works, he works by means. This is anything but a right view of the subject, and that is anything but faith which leads to these views, and to this course of conduct; and this state of spiritual indolence, and this waiting for God are any thing but gospel rest. Faith always implies a diligent and constant use of means. Faith respects not only the fact that God will do thus and thus, but also recognizes the fact that he will do it by the appointed means.--Consequently true faith in God leads to any thing but the neglect of employing the suitable instrumentality to effect the

desired object.

3. The rest of faith does not imply that the Church is to be sanctified, and the world converted, without the diligent and effectual co-operation of those who are co-workers with God.

4. Nor rest from labors of love.

5. Nor rest from watchfulness. Nor from any of those holy exertions that are indispensable to guard against our enemies in this state of trial, and while in an enemy's country. Nor does it imply any cessation from a diligent use of all the means of instruction, and of grace, both for our own and others' edification, and salvation.

6. Nor the casting off responsibility, and the giving ourselves up to be drifted in any direction, by the tides of influence which surround us.

7. Nor does it imply an exemption from temptation. Christ was tempted in all points like as we are. And from our circumstances in this world, it is impossible that we should not continue to be the constant subjects of temptation, from the world, the flesh and the devil. Nor does it imply exemption from all heaviness and distress of mind. Christ was in heaviness. Paul had great heaviness and continual sorrow of heart on account of his brethren. And Peter in his general epistle to the saints says, "Now are we in heaviness through manifold temptations." Nor does it imply exemption from severe trials and mental conflicts, for these things may always be expected while we are in the flesh. And the gospel plainly teaches that to us it is given, not only to believe in Christ, but also to suffer for his sake. But gospel rest does imply,

1. A complete cessation from all our own selfish works, the end of which is to promote our own interests, temporal or eternal.

2. It implies a cessation from all self-righteous efforts. By self-righteous efforts, I mean,

(1) All attempts to recommend ourselves to God by our own works.

(2) All efforts to avoid punishment, or escape from the wrath of God by any efforts of our own.

(3) All those things which originate in our own convictions, and are performed in the strength of our own resolutions without being influenced thereto by the love of God in our heart.

[3.]4. This rest implies a state of mind that feels no necessity for attempting anything in our own strength. There is a state of mind, which perhaps is better known by experience than described by words, in which an individual feels pressed with a necessity of doing something, and every thing in a manner which shall be acceptable to God. And yet, on account of his unbelief, he feels agonized with the thought that he is in no such sense strengthened by the Spirit of God, as shall, as a matter of fact, enable him, and cause him to do that which his convictions of duty demand of him. This is a distracting restless state of mind, and the exact opposite of the rest of faith. Faith so leans upon God, as to bring the mind into a state of sweet repose and confidence that God will help, and that there is no necessity for making any efforts in our own strength.

[4.]5. It implies exemption from all the carefulness induced by unbelief on every subject. Faith reposes in God for time and for eternity, for direction, and help, and provisions in temporal as well as spiritual

matters. It excludes all carefulness, in the proper sense of that term, on every subject.

[5.]6. It implies exemption from the fear of death, and hell. Faith produces that perfect love that casteth out fear--the fear of future want--of the judgments of God--that we shall be overcome by our enemies spiritual or temporal--and of all that fear that hath torment.

[6.]7. It implies an exemption from a sense of condemnation. "There is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit."

[7.]8. A rest from the reproaches of conscience. In a state of unbelief, conscience often inflicts grievous wounds upon the peace of the soul. But when we take possession of the rest of faith, the conscience is as quiet as a lamb.

[8.]9. It implies an exemption from being afflicted or distressed with the occurrences of life. The soul is able to meet with calmness and sweetness that which would otherwise throw the mind into a state of the utmost agitation and distress. By this I do not mean, as I have said above, that individuals will have no trials; but that this state of mind will enable them to pass through their trials with a composed and heavenly temper. Mrs. President Edwards says of herself, that for some years there were two trials which she thought she should be unable to bear. One was the loss of her husband's confidence, and ill treatment from him--the other was the loss of the confidence and respect of the people of the town in which they lived. But when she entered fully into the rest of faith, she declares, that it did not appear to her, as if those things could, in the least, affect her happiness or disturb the repose of her mind. It appeared to her as if she were as far above being discomposed by anything that could occur in the Providence of God, as the sun is high above the earth--that to be treated with the utmost disrespect by her husband--to be cast out by the people of the town to perish in the snow, would not break up the deep tranquillity and repose of her mind in God.

[9.]10. It implies exemption from the dominion of temptation. I have said, that in this life, we may always as a thing of course expect more or less temptation. But this rest is a state of mind in which temptation will not prevail. It will assail us, and make a greater or less impression upon our minds, i.e. it will in a greater or less degree agitate and ruffle our feelings in proportion to the strength of our faith.

[10.]11. Finally, and in a word, it implies exemption from the strength and dominion of sin in all its forms. The case supposed by the Apostle in the seventh chapter of Romans, to illustrate the influence of law over one who is carnal and sold under sin, is a striking exemplification of that state of slavery to lust and passion in which great multitudes, both in and out of the Church, are. And the striking transition from that state of mind into that described in the eighth chapter, exactly illustrates what I mean by an individual passing from a state of slavery and sin into a state of liberty and rest.

V. How we may seem to come short of it.

The word rendered seem here does not imply what is commonly meant by the English term seem, as if the coming short were only in appearance and not in fact. But from the manner in which it is rendered in other passages, it is manifest that it means to express the actual coming short, as if the Apostle had said, lest any of you should be seen to come short of it.

1. We may fail of entering into this rest by mistaking its nature, and thinking we have it while we have not. Many have seemed to suppose that it consists in spiritual indolence, or in such an exemption from

responsibility as would give the mind up to be drifted without resistance in any direction in which the corrupt currents of this world might drive it. They seem to get the idea that all things are lawful to them in such a sense, that almost any kind of indulgence is consistent with spiritual purity, and the love of God. Gospel rest, to them, is the mere casting off of responsibility--a lolling and wallowing in their own filthy indulgences.

2. Many fail to enter into this rest, by not realizing that there is any such state. They seem not to know any thing about the tranquilizing effects of faith, and that state of deep repose in God which those enjoy who have taken possession of the promised rest. They seem to suppose that the christian warfare consists in that mental conflict which they are conscious is going on within themselves, with their hearts and consciences. They are conscious of a continual mutiny being kept up between the conflicting powers of their own minds, which they express by saying they are constantly sinning and repenting, by which nothing more can be meant than that their hearts and consciences are at fearful war with each other. They appear to be utter strangers to the sweet peace and repose of mind which results from a harmony of the powers of their own mind, where their conscience and their heart are at one. Understanding from the Bible that their warfare is to continue through this life, and mistaking their inward conflicts for the Christian warfare, they take it for granted that no such rest as that of which I have spoken, exists.

3. Many fail to enter into this rest because they think it belongs exclusively to heaven. Now that this rest will be more perfect in heaven than it is on earth is undeniably true. But it is the same in kind, on earth as in heaven, just as holiness is. Now if persons do not become holy on earth, how should they hope to be holy in heaven? And if this rest be not begun on earth, it will never be enjoyed in heaven.

4. Many come short of this rest by supposing that the world, the flesh and Satan put the attainment of it utterly out of the question. It is amazing to see how little of the gospel is understood and received by the Church. It would seem that in the estimation of the great mass of the Church, the gospel itself has made no adequate provision for the entire sanctification of men in this world of temptation. Just as if God were unable to overcome these enemies in any other way than by snatching his children out of their reach; and that Christ came not so much to destroy the works of the devil in this world, as to drive his people out of it and get them off from his ground--that he destroys the flesh because he is unable to overcome it--and that he will burn up the world because he is unable to prevent its leading his people into sin. Now it does appear to me that God's glory demands, that the battle should be fought, and the victory won in this world. The Apostle plainly represents us, under the grace of God, as "not only conquerors but more than conquerors." And he certainly has but a very limited knowledge of the Bible, or of the grace of God who can assume that the world, the flesh, and Satan are too strong for Christ so that he cannot save his people from their sins.

5. Ignorance of the power of faith is another reason why persons do not enter into this rest. They do not understand that as a matter of fact, faith in the existence, power, goodness, providence and grace of God--that unwavering confidence in all he does and says, would in its own nature as a thing of course, bring them into the rest of which I am speaking.

Suppose a ship should be bestormed at sea, that all on board is confusion, dismay, and almost despair--the ship is driven by a fierce tempest upon a lee shore. Now suppose that in the midst of all the uncertainty, racking, and almost distracting anxiety of the passengers and crew, a voice should be heard from heaven, they knowing it to be the voice of the eternal God, assuring them that the ship should be safe--that not a hair of their heads should perish--and that they should ride out the storm in perfect safety.

It is easy to see that the effect of this announcement upon different minds would be in precise proportion to their confidence in its truth. If they believed it, they would by no means throw up the helm, and give themselves up to indolence and let the ship drive before the waves, but standing, every man at his place, and managing the ship in the best manner possible, they would enjoy a quiet and composed mind in proportion to their confidence that all would be well. If any did not believe it, their anxiety and trouble would continue of course, and they might wonder at the calmness of those who did; and even reproach them for not being as anxious as themselves. You might see among them every degree of feeling from the despair and deep forebodings of utter unbelief, up to the full measure of the entire consolation of perfect faith. Now the design of this illustration is to show the nature of faith, and to demonstrate that entire confidence in God naturally hushes all the tumults of the mind, and settles it into a state of deep repose--that it does not beget inaction, presumption or spiritual indolence any more than the revelation of which I have spoken, would beget inattention to its management on board the ship.

[6.]7. Another reason is, many are discouraged by the misrepresentations of the spies who have been sent to spy out the land. It is a painful and really an alarming consideration, that so many of those who are leaders in Israel, and who are supposed by the Church to have gone up and reconnoitered the whole land of spiritual experience, that almost with united voice they should return to the Church, and represent that we are unable to go up and possess the land. Of all those that were sent by Moses to spy out the land only two had any faith in the promise of God, whereas all the rest united in their testimony that they were unable to possess the land.--And that rest was unattainable to them in this life. So it appears to me in these days. Those that are appointed to direct and encourage the people, by first acquainting themselves thoroughly with the ground to be possessed, and then carrying to the people the confidence of faith, encouraging them, not only by the promises of God, but by their own experience and observation, that the land may be possessed--instead of this they bring up an evil report, discourage the hearts of the people of God, maintain that the grace of God has made no sufficient provisions for their taking possession of the land of holiness in this life, that the world, the flesh and the devil are such mighty Anakims as that to overcome them is utterly out of the question, and that no hope remains, only as we flee from their territories and get out of the world the best way we can. Now I greatly fear that will happen to them which came upon the spies in the days of Moses. They were driven back, and their carcasses fell in the wilderness. God swore in his wrath, that they should not enter into his rest. And not only they, but that entire generation who were deceived by them, and who could not enter in because of unbelief, were wasted away and died without rest in the wilderness. How many generations of the Church of God shall thus be wasted away in the wilderness of sin! How long will generation after generation of spies continue to bring up their evil report, discouraging the hearts, and confirming the unbelief of the people, and effectually preventing their taking possession of that rest which remains for the people of God!

[7.]8. Many are discouraged by the present and past attainments of Christians. They are constantly stumbled by the consideration that holy men of former and present times have known so little of full gospel salvation. They might just as reasonably let the past and present state of the world shake their confidence in the fact that the world will ever be converted. And indeed, whether they are aware of it or not, I suppose they have as much confidence in the one as in the other. They seem not to be aware of the fact that they are full of unbelief in regard to the world's conversion, while they are sensible that they have no confidence in the attainableness of rest from all their sins in this life.--The reason why they are sensible of unbelief in the one case and not in the other is, the one is placed before them as a present duty, in attempting to perform which they experience the chilling influence of unbelief--while the other is a thing which they have never tried to do, and which they do not understand to be their duty to do. Consequently a want of

confidence in respect to this, is not the object of the mind's attention. Certainly a state of mind that can be discouraged by the past or present history of the Church, would of course feel the same discouragement, and have the same reason for discouragement, in regard to the world's conversion.

[8.]9. Others fail to take possession of this rest on account of the ignorance of the real attainments of the ancient and modern saints. They have taken but little pains to examine carefully into the history of eminent saints either ancient or modern, and of course do not know what the grace of God has actually done for men.

[9.]10. Many fail from a regard to their reputation. They have so much fear of being called heretics, fanatics, perfectionists or some other opprobrious name, that they resist the Spirit and truth of God.

[10.]11. Pride and prejudice prevent a careful and honest examination of the subject. I have been amazed, and I might add ashamed, to witness the great ignorance of the Bible, and of the real merits of this question, in the articles that have appeared in the different periodicals of the present day.--They have reminded me of the conduct of Dr. Hill in the late General Assembly, when the discussion of the question of slavery came up. He arose and read certain passages of scripture, with as much assurance as if he supposed they had been overlooked by the abolitionists--as if he supposed it would be entirely manifest that these scriptures were a "Thus saith the Lord" in the face of all abolitionism. He afterwards intimated that he was master of the subject, and seemed not to understand that all his arguments and scriptures, and grounds of objection had often been weighed in the balance and found wanting. Now just so it has appeared to me when I have read the various articles that have appeared of late against the attainableness of entire sanctification in this life. The least I could say, would be in the words of President Edwards, that "they have not well considered the matter."

[11.]12. Many fail because they are too proud to confess their ignorance and want of spirituality, and put themselves in the attitude of inquirers. A vast many individuals are not aware of their own ignorance and want of spirituality, and many who are convinced of their ignorance and their destitution of spirituality, seem to think it indispensable to their usefulness to conceal their defects and to keep up the appearance, at least, of sound knowledge and sound piety. And some, how many I cannot say, have adopted it as a principle not to speak much of their own experience in the divine life.

[12.]13. Many are ashamed to be taught by the ignorant, though spiritual christians. There are perhaps but few among ministers and church officers who might not take some most useful and salutary lessons from some obscure female or other unnoticed person in the Church. Unless a man is willing to sit at the feet of any spiritual child of God, he is never likely to know what that rest is that remaineth for the people of God.

[13.]14. Pride of learning and dependence upon their own powers of criticism, have done and are doing much to shut the learned world out of faith. There is a great tendency in a certain class of minds to substitute their own reasonings for faith, to believe what they can establish by reasoning and argument, and to hold as fanatical or doubtful any depth of spirituality that they cannot fathom by their "inch of line." Nor do they seem aware that the confidence which they have in those things which they cannot establish by reason, is not faith in the truth of God, but a leaning to their own understanding. God's testimony is to be set aside unless it is backed up and established by their own profound reasonings and criticisms.

[14.]15. Another reason is many settle down into a stereotyped orthodoxy and are opposed to all advances in religious knowledge and experience.

[15.]16. Others fail because they are waiting and struggling for some preparation before they go up and take possession of the land. They do not understand that they are immediately to enter into this rest by faith. They are waiting for certain feelings and views to prepare them to exercise faith, not knowing that these very views and feelings are the effects of faith. Thus they expect the effect to precede the cause.

[16.]17. Others fail through sheer carelessness. The Apostle exhorts the Church to take heed in this matter, and certainly without attention and inquiry this rest will not be attained.

VI. How we may take possession of it.

This rest is to be possessed at once by anchoring down in naked faith upon the promises of God. Take the illustration which I have already given, viz: the ship at sea. Suppose she were dashing upon the rocks, and a voice from heaven should cry out, "Let go your sheet anchor and all shall be safe." Suppose they believed that. With what confidence and composure would they let go the anchor, understanding it to be certain that it would bring them up and that they should ride out the storm. Now this composure of mind, any one may see, might and would be entered upon at once by an act of naked faith. Just so there are no circumstances in which men are ever placed, where they may not enter into rest at once by anchoring down in naked faith upon the promises of God. Let the first six verses of the 37 Psalm be an illustration of what I mean. "Fret not thyself because of evil-doers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity: For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb. Trust in the Lord and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass. And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday." Now suppose an individual to be borne down by the persecution of his enemies, or to be so situated in his temporal circumstances as not to know what he should do for bread. Let him take hold upon these promises, and peace and rest would flow in upon his mind, and light and joy would spring up like the sun breaking through an ocean of storm.

Take the promise in Isa. 42:16. Suppose the soul to be surrounded with darkness, perplexity, and doubt, with regard to the path of duty, or with regard to any other matter--borne down under a weight of ignorance, and crushed with a sense of responsibility, however deep his agony and his trials may be. Hark! Hear Jehovah saying, "I will bring the blind by a way that they know not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them and not forsake them." Now who does not see that faith in this promise would make the soul in a moment as quiet as a weaned child. It would at once become as calm as an ocean of love.

Take Isa. 41:10-14. Suppose a soul to be under circumstances of great temptation from the world, the flesh and the devil, and ready to exclaim, "my feet are slipping, and I shall fall into the hand of my enemies, I have no might against this host. All my strength is weakness, and I shall dishonor my God." Hark again! Hear the word of the Lord. "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. Behold, all they that were incensed against thee shall be ashamed and confounded; they shall be as nothing; and they that strive with thee shall perish. Thou shalt seek them, and shalt not find them, even them that contended with thee: they that war against thee shall be as nothing, and as a thing of nought. For I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee. Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel: I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel." What is here but an ocean of consolation to a mind that has faith?

Now what wait ye for. Anchor right down upon these promises. They can give you instant rest. Nothing but faith is wanting to put you in possession of it. And nothing else than faith can do you any good. There is no need of going around, or waiting to come at this rest by degrees. It is to be entered upon at once. The land may be possessed now in the twinkling of an eye.

I designed to have added several remarks, but as I intend to pursue this subject at another time, I will defer them till then.

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