

The Rest of Faith--No. 2

by Charles Finney

Faith instantly introduces the soul into a state of rest, while unbelief renders the rest of the soul impossible.

Scripture: Matthew 11:28, John 14:1, Romans 15:13, 2 Corinthians 5:7, Ephesians 2:8-9, Philippians 4:6-7, Hebrews 3:19 - 4:1, James 1:6, 1 Peter 5:7

Topics: "Faith", "Unbelief"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the critical role of faith in entering into God's promised rest, as outlined in Hebrews 3:19 and 4:1. He explains that while the promise of rest was given, it is faith that enables individuals to claim it, while unbelief prevents them from experiencing this spiritual rest. Finney illustrates that faith brings peace and confidence in God's goodness, while unbelief leads to anxiety, dissatisfaction, and spiritual turmoil. He warns that unbelief is a grave sin that hinders one's relationship with God and ultimately results in misery. The sermon calls believers to recognize the importance of faith in their spiritual journey and the consequences of failing to trust in God's promises.

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.

Upon these words I remark:

1. That this rest, into which they could not enter, had been expressly promised to them.
2. That though no condition was expressly annexed to this promise, yet faith as a condition was necessarily implied; for if they had no confidence in the promise, they would of course neglect the necessary means to gain possession of the promised land.
3. Unbelief rendered the fulfillment of the promise impossible, in as much as it prevented their going up and taking possession when commanded to do so.
4. In my last, I showed that the land of Canaan was typical of spiritual rest or the rest of faith.
5. This spiritual rest is expressly promised, and it is said that some must enter therein, yet faith is an indispensable condition to its fulfillment.

These remarks prepare the way for the discussion of the two following propositions:

I. THAT FAITH INSTANTLY INTRODUCES THE SOUL INTO A STATE OF REST.

II. THAT UNBELIEF RENDERS THE REST OF THE SOUL IMPOSSIBLE.

I. Faith instantly introduces the soul into a state of rest.

1. This is evident from the nature of faith. Faith is the confidence of the heart in the truth of God. It is a resting, a repose of the mind in God. Faith is that state of mind in which every thing is confidently committed to the wisdom and goodness of God. Faith is either satisfied with what we at present have, and is a confidence that this is best for us, and most for God's glory; or it trusts in God to make such changes in our circumstances and in our allotments as shall be most for his glory and our interest.

2. Faith implies such a confidence as to exclude all anxiety about our own interest for time or eternity. It is a confidence that God both knows, and is concerned to supply all our wants--that he is both able and willing to be and do to us, and for us, all that our souls and bodies need. It therefore excludes all anxiety in regard to our present or future interests whether for time or for eternity.

3. Faith is that confidence in God's wisdom and goodness that prefers to have, and to be denied whatever seems good in his sight. It chooses by all means that God should mete out our changes, order our affairs, and dispose of every thing concerning us. Faith would by no means consent to have any thing otherwise than according to the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

4. Faith finds in Christ all the necessities of soul and body amply provided for. It takes right hold on Christ as "our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification and our redemption." Faith sees the meaning of such expressions as these in the gospel, and lays fast hold on them, and so appropriates them to its own circumstances and necessities as to feel no more trouble about its own destiny, than a man who stands on everlasting rock will doubt its strength to support him. Thus faith, from its own nature, puts carefulness and disquietude entirely out of the question.

II. Unbelief renders the rest of the soul impossible.

1. This is evident from the nature of unbelief.--Unbelief is not the mere absence of faith. It is distrust--the refusal of the heart to trust in the truth, wisdom, providence and grace of God. Consequently, in unbelief, the soul can find nothing on which to rest for a moment. It is not satisfied with its present circumstances, because there is no confidence in the wisdom and goodness of him who appointed them.

2. Unbelief renders it impossible for the mind to feel any security against future ills temporal or spiritual.

3. There is nothing in a state of unbelief that can support the mind amid the necessary vicissitudes of life. God's government is moving on upon a vast scale, and extends not only through immensity, but throughout eternity. Now it is self-evident that in the administration of such a vast system of providences, innumerable things will occur, that minds like ours cannot understand at present, and the design of which we are utterly unable to see. Nor would it be possible for God, in our present state, and with our present knowledge, to explain things so as to possess our minds with all the reasons for his conduct. With infinitely more ease, could a parent engaged in the most extensive worldly business in which any man was ever engaged, explain to a child two years old the reason of his movements. The child has such confidence in his parent, that he needs not to know the reason of any thing he does. But suppose the child had no

confidence in the wisdom and goodness of his parent, and still had knowledge enough to understand that in ten thousand ways his own inclination might be thwarted by the administration of his father's providence. This would naturally and certainly keep his mind in a state of continual vexation. So, under the government of God, it is impossible that we should not pass through a constant series of vicissitudes and changes which will continue to vex and fret the mind that is in the exercise of unbelief. Suppose the holy angels had not confidence in God. What think you would be the state of mind into which they would be thrown by all the sin and misery they behold in this world?

4. In unbelief the soul finds nothing to satisfy its desires. Having no communion with, or resting in God, its very nature is such that nothing in the universe can satisfy it. It has no such friend as it feels itself to need. The soul naturally feels that it needs a friend with the attributes of a God. It knows full well that all earthly friends however faithful, are yet frail, and utterly unable to be to them all they need. There is no portion but God that can satisfy the soul. The experience and observation of every day, teach, that, multiply earthly goods without end, and the soul is as far and even farther from being satisfied than at the first. The more of any finite good the soul obtains, the more does it realize its wants, and either grasps and heaves with convulsive longings after more, or feeling the utter insufficiency of any finite good, it loathes them all. God is the only possible satisfying portion of the soul, and it is as impossible that the soul should find a resting place except in God, as that a dove should rest in mid heaven, with weary wing, without a place upon which to rest the sole of her foot. Unbelief then is the soul's refusal to settle down and rest upon the infinite wisdom, goodness, truth and grace of God. It is the soul's refusal to bathe in the ocean of his love--to bask in the sunlight of his countenance--to rest sweetly and composedly in his hand, and hide under the cover of his wing. Consequently,

5. The soul in unbelief has no sufficient barrier against the power of temptation. Lust rages, and of course reigns while unbelief is in the heart.--The soul without faith has no perception of those higher motives that lift its desires and affections above sensible objects. And in this state, the mind is given over to the reigning power of the flesh, and the gratification of sense becomes the soul's supreme object of pursuit. Thus the soul becomes the slave of the body. The spiritual eye being shut, and the bodily eye open, the whole being grovels in the dust like a brute. While the soul is chained down to this miserable earth, it languishes, and groans, and hopes, and ever hopes in vain for future or present good to satisfy its immortal cravings. Being thus delivered up to the power of temptation, it wallows in its own filth, and is even ashamed of its own deformity. It loathes itself, and abhors every thing else. A universal feeling of distrust, and enmity, and hell, keep it continually on the rack.

6. I said that in unbelief, the soul was of course, delivered over to the reigning power of lust. The mind must be under the influence of motives of some kind. If unbelief prevails, no motive from eternity--from heaven--no voice or truth of God--no spiritual or elevating considerations will call the attention of the mind, and elevate its aims, and hopes, and efforts. The whole spiritual world being annihilated in the estimation of such a mind, and the world of sense being that alone from which such a mind receives impressions, all the motives under which it acts or in such a case can act, being those derived from sensible objects, it will be influenced by such considerations as might affect the beasts.

7. Another reason why unbelief renders the rest of the soul impossible is this. Where there is any degree of spiritual light, the conscience is quickened to keep the distrustful mind in a state of perpetual disquietude.

8. Unbelief delivers the soul over to a train of emotions, exercises, and affections, which constitute essential misery. The soul that distrusts the wisdom, goodness, and providence of God, will, as a thing of course, be greatly soured by the providences of God, and misanthropized by the conduct of men. To such a mind everything goes wrong.--Understanding and believing nothing of God's great plan of government, the universe seems to such a mind as little else than a general chaos or ocean of confusion and misery. And being supremely selfish, it is continually rasped and outraged by the selfish collisions of clashing interests with which it is surrounded. To trust in man, it cannot, and feels that it has no reason. To trust in God, it will not, and consequently it has no place of repose in the world.

9. Unbelief therefore plunges the mind into an ocean of storms, and keeps it there. Ignorance of the past--uncertainty of the future--a prey to lust and passion--without hope and without God--to rest is impossible.

REMARKS.

1. Both faith and unbelief are volitions, and are therefore in the highest sense within our reach, i.e. we are in the highest and most absolute sense voluntary in their exercise. It is utterly absurd to say that we are unable to exercise either faith or unbelief. Faith is the mind's acceptance of the truth of God. Unbelief is the mind's rejection of that truth.

2. Faith is indispensable, in moral beings, to all virtue and all holiness in all worlds. Were it not for their confidence in God, how soon would the angels be stumbled at his providence and fall into rebellion. How many myriads of things does God find it necessary to do, the reasons and wisdom of which they cannot at present understand. Faith therefore is as indispensable to their virtue and happiness as to ours.

3. We can see why God has taken so much pains to inspire faith. The great object of all his dispensations, and all his works and ways is to make himself known, and thereby secure the confidence of intelligent creatures. Knowing that their virtue and eternal happiness depend on this, he spares no pains, nay he did not hesitate to give his only begotten and well beloved Son, to secure the confidence of his creatures in his love.

4. We see that unbelief is the most shocking and abhorrent wickedness. Suppose that children should refuse to trust their parents, and casting off all confidence in their goodness and providence, they should refuse all obedience except the reasons for every thing were satisfactorily explained--that neither the wisdom or justice of any requirement or prohibition could be admitted without being made plain in all their relations to their comprehension--that the parent could be trusted for nothing, but that all was distrust and of course murmuring, uncertainty and discontent. Who does not see that any family under the influence of unbelief, would present an image of bedlam, and would be an epitome of hell? What parent would not consider himself insulted in the highest degree, and feel the utmost certainty that his family were ruined, if unbelief should come to be the prevailing principle of action? We naturally feel in the highest degree insulted and outraged, whenever our veracity is called in question. And you can scarcely anger men sooner than to suffer even an incredulous look to advertise them that you doubt their word. And what is there more shocking and offensive among dearest friends than to discover among those we love a want of confidence in us? Let every husband and wife--let every parent and child--every friend that is susceptible of the feelings of humanity, rise up and bear witness. Say, is there any thing within the whole circle of disgusting and agonizing considerations that is capable of inflicting a deeper wound upon your peace, than a discovery of a want of confidence in those you love? It is an arrow dipped in deadly poison. It is

unmingled gall. Now how infinitely abominable must unbelief be in the sight of God. What! his own offspring cast off confidence in their heavenly Father! virtually accusing him of lying and hypocrisy, and proudly disdain all comfort, and impiously and ridiculously insisting upon every thing being made plain to their understanding so that they can see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and thrust their hand into the wound in their Savior's side, or they will not believe. How must it grieve the heart of God to see such a state of things as this existing in his family? Distrust, and consequent confusion reigning all around, and no pains-taking on his part, prevails to secure confidence, and hush the tumultuous elements of conflicting mind to rest.

5. You can see why unbelief is so anathematized in the Bible, as that awful sin against which God has unmasked all the batteries of heaven. The reason is, it is at once the foundation, and implies the whole aggregate of all abominations. It breaks the power of moral government--shuts out the peace of God--lets in the infernal brood of all the abominable passions of earth and hell upon the soul.

6. You who do not enter into the rest of faith may understand your present character and your prospects. Remember that you are in the exercise of this greatest of all infernal sins. Unbelief is the sin and the misery of hell. It is the sin and misery of earth. Why do you harbor such an infernal monster in your bosom? It is as hideous and frightful as the Apocalyptic beast with seven heads and ten horns, and as full of curses as the seven last plagues.

7. How strange that unbelief is so seldom reckoned as sin. When professors of religion and impenitent men are enumerating their sins, they almost never consider unbelief as the foundation and cause of all their other sins. In confessing their sins to God, if at all sensible of unbelief, they seem to whine over it as a calamity, rather than confess and mourn over it as a crime. While this is so, and unbelief is neither understood nor repented of as a sin, there is no prospect of a reconciliation between God and the soul.

8. Faith is the most simple and easy exercise of the mind conceivable. It is one of the earliest and most frequent exercises of the human mind. It is one of the first exercises that we witness in little children. Confidence in those around them seems to be as natural to them as their breath. The admirable simplicity, sincerity, and confidence of little children in their parents and those around them, are truly affecting, and afford a beautiful illustration of the wisdom and goodness of God. This confidence which is so natural to them is indispensable to their well-being in almost every respect. Now confidence in God differs nothing in kind, so far as the philosophy of mind is concerned, from confidence in parents. While the little child knows nothing of its wants, present or future, nothing of its dangers, and has no idea of any other wants than what its parents can supply, it rests in peace, confiding in its earthly friends for all its necessities. But as soon as he learns how little confidence can be placed in men, and that its necessities are far-reaching beyond the power of any human arm, its confidence in its parents can no longer keep the soul at rest. Hence:

9. For those who will not believe there can be no remedy. Salvation to them is a natural impossibility. Under the wings of unbelief are congregated and sheltered the whole brood and catalogue of the miseries of earth and hell. Nothing but faith can be a remedy for their accumulated evils. At the bidding of faith the whole congregation of abominations break up and are scattered to the winds of heaven. But to the influence of nothing else can the mind yield itself up, that will relieve its anxieties[,] dissipate its forebodings, and lull it into sweet repose upon the bosom of the blessed God.

10. How few have faith enough to enter into rest. In my last I assigned several reasons why the Church does not enter into the rest of faith. It is perfectly obvious upon the very face of the Church that very few of her members have entered into rest. They are filled with nearly the same cares and anxieties as other men. This is a great stumbling block to the world, and they often inquire what is religion worth? They see their professedly Christian friends, as restless, and fretful, and uneasy as themselves. What then, they inquire, can religion be?

11. The great mass of the Church have just conviction enough to make them even more miserable than worldly men. They have so much conviction of sin, and of the reality of eternal things, as to render it impossible for them to enjoy the world, and, having no faith, they do not enjoy God. Consequently they are really destitute of all enjoyment, and are the most miserable of all the inhabitants of earth; i.e. their inward unhappiness is great, often beyond expression or endurance. They are so miserable themselves, as to make all around them unhappy. I know a woman who is little else than a bundle of disquietudes. I scarcely ever saw her five minutes in my life without her falling into a complaining strain of herself or somebody else. Every thing and every body are wrong. And whenever any one thinks she is wrong, it is because they do not understand her. I have several times thought, it might well be said of her, she is of all women most miserable. It would seem that she cannot be made to see that the whole difficulty lies in her unbelief, but full of uneasiness about the present, and forebodings as to the future, blaming every body, and blamed by every body, she seems to be afloat upon an ocean of darkness and storms.

12. It seems almost impossible to make those who are filled with unbelief understand what is the nature of their difficulty. They often have so much conviction as to think that they believe. You tell them to believe, they tell you they do believe. They seem not to discriminate at all between intellectual conviction, and the repose of the heart in the truth.

13. You can see the desperate folly, wickedness, and madness of infidelity. Infidels seem to imagine that if they can get rid of the impression of the truths of Christianity, can persuade themselves that the Bible is not true--and thus shake off their fears and sense of responsibility, they shall be happy. O fools and blind. What utter madness is in such conclusions as these! for in exact proportion to their unbelief is their desperate and incurable misery. An immortal mind with all its immortal wants and desires, launched upon the ocean of life and crowded forward without the possibility of annihilation--covered with complete ignorance and darkness with regard to the past--a veil of impenetrable midnight stretched over all the future--winds and waves roaring around him--rocks and breakers just before him--no helm--no compass--no star of hope--no voice of mercy--nowhere to rest--no prospect of safety--not a point in the wide universe on which the mind can repose for a moment. Considered in every point of view, infidelity is the consummation of madness, of folly, and of desperate wickedness.

14. If you, to whom this rest is preached, fail to enter in because of unbelief, a future generation will enter in. The Apostle says, "It remains that some must enter in." The promise in regard to the Church that some generation shall enter in is absolute. As it respects individuals, whether you or your children, or some future generation shall enter in, must depend upon your or their exercise of faith. The contemporaries of Moses did not enter into temporal Canaan because of their unbelief but the next generation took possession of it through faith.

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