

How to Prolong the Gracious Visits of Christ.

by Edward Payson

To prolong Christ's gracious visits, we must render his continuance with us agreeable, show him we value his presence, and furnish him with employments to do good.

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 7:14, Psalm 16:11, Psalm 27:8, Psalm 51:10, Matthew 18:20, Luke 4:42, John 14:23, Hebrews 4:16, James 4:8, Revelation 3:20

Topics: "Christ Presence", "Spiritual Renewal"

Description

Edward Payson preaches about the importance of seeking and valuing the presence of Christ in our lives, using the example of the people in Capernaum who earnestly desired Jesus to stay with them. He emphasizes the need to make Christ's presence pleasant by renouncing sin and embracing holiness, expressing a deep desire for His presence through prayer, repentance, humility, and assigning reasons for Him to stay. Payson highlights the detrimental effects of Christ's departure, such as spiritual decline, disunity, and spiritual death, urging believers to diligently seek and retain His presence through prayer, penitence, humility, and providing opportunities for Him to do good.

Transcript

"And when it was day he departed, and went into a desert place; and the people sought him, and came unto him, and stayed him, that he should not depart from them"

Luke 4:42

blessed Saviour, while on earth, met with a very different reception in different places. In one place we see all the inhabitants uniting in a request that he would depart out of their coasts. In another, they were so much provoked by his doctrine, that they thrust him out of their city, and led him to the brow of the hill on which it stood, with a design to cast him down headlong. Here, on the contrary, we see multitudes seeking him, and using every means in their power to prevent or retard his departure.

The place where his presence was thus earnestly desired, was Capernaum. The inhabitants of this city heard him preach, and they were astonished at his doctrine. They saw him cast out a devil and were all amazed, and said one to another, What a word is this? Determined to improve the opportunity, which his presence afforded, they pressed upon him to hear the word of God, and brought to him all their sick to be healed. Having spent the day and the evening in these labors of love, our Saviour rose early the next morning, and departed into a desert place, partly for the purpose of prayer, and partly, perhaps, to see

whether they would follow him and request his longer stay.

This temporary withdrawal only rendered them the more desirous of his presence. They sought him, and came unto him, and stayed him, that he should not depart from them. My friends, the Saviour is still, though invisibly, present in our world. Wherever his ministers are, there he is; for he has promised to be with them always, even to the end of the world. Wherever his people assemble in his name, there he is; for he has promised to be in the midst of them on such occasions. Sometimes, but not always, he chooses to manifest his presence by the production of visible effects.

When this is the case, a revival of religion ensues. The spiritually sick are healed, and the spiritually dead raised to life. But it is often the case that, at such seasons, he seems to withdraw for a time, to see whether his presence is desired, whether his absence will be mourned, whether his people will be excited to greater diligence in seeking him. When this is the case, we may learn from our text what duty requires of us. We must seek him diligently, and, if possible, find him, and constrain him not to depart from us.

In discoursing farther on this passage, I shall endeavor to show, I. What means should be employed by a society that is favored with the gracious visits of Christ, to prolong their continuance, and prevent his departure; and, II. To state some of the reasons which should induce us to employ these means. I. What means should be employed to prolong the gracious visits of Christ? 1. I answer, generally, we must endeavor to render his continuance with us agreeable to himself; and to avoid or banish from among us every thing which tends to render it otherwise.

When we wish to induce an earthly friend to reside with us as long as possible, we naturally endeavor to render his residence with us agreeable; for no person will voluntarily continue long in a disagreeable place, or in unpleasant society. It is the same with respect to Christ. We must make his visits pleasant, or they will be few and of short continuance. Now nothing is so pleasant to him as holiness; nothing is so hateful to him as sin. Sin then, must be renounced and mortified, and holiness loved and practiced, if we would induce him to stay long with us.

But more particularly; if we would prolong our Saviour's gracious visits, either to ourselves, to our habitations, or to the place in which we reside, we must show him that we greatly desire, and highly value his presence. No person will consent to stay long with those, by whom his presence is not desired. Least of all will those consent to this, who are sensible of their own worth, and who know that there are other places, where they would be more welcome. Now our blessed Saviour is perfectly sensible of his own worth.

He knows that his favor is life, and his loving kindness better than life; and that, in comparison with himself every thing is worthless. He knows that, great and powerful as he is, he can confer no favor upon a church or upon individuals more valuable than his gracious presence. He, therefore, justly expects that we should prize it accordingly, and consider every thing else as nothing in comparison with this. His language is, He that loveth father or mother, son or daughter, yea, his own life, more than me, is not worthy of me.

If, therefore, he perceives that we love and desire any object whatever more than his presence, he will consider us unworthy of it and depart. Agreeably, we find him saying, respecting his ancient people, when they seemed to prefer other objects to himself, I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge the offence and seek my face. The fact is, that, when we prefer any object to Christ, we make an idol of that object, and set up that idol in his presence. And can we expect that he will continue long with those who prefer an idol before him?

Would he, while on earth, have gone into an idolatrous temple, and continued there, patiently witnessing his own disgrace, and choosing such a place as his residence? Certainly not; nor will he now long continue in a heart, in a house, or in a place, where he sees any idol preferred before him. The psalmist could say, If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning; if I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.

Similar must be our feelings with respect to Christ, if we would enjoy his presence. We must prefer it above our chief joy; and be able to exclaim with David, There be many that say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon me. Nor is it enough to feel these desires. We must express them to him in prayer; or they will be like the fruitless wishes of the sluggard, who desireth and hath nothing. Prayer is the offering up of our desires to God; and he will not seem to know our desires, much less gratify them, unless they are expressed and offered up to him in his appointed way.

The more he seems to depart from us, the more earnestly must we follow him with our prayers and supplications, saying, with Jacob, We will not let thee go, except thou bless us; and, like the persons mentioned in our text, staying him that he may not forsake us. 2. With prayer we must unite penitence. Especially must we repent of those sins, which have been the probable cause of his beginning to withdraw. This is indispensably necessary; for we are told, that the Lord is near to them that have a broken heart, and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.

Without this, even prayer will not avail, as is evident from the case of Joshua, when his army was repulsed before Ai. Perplexed, grieved, and astonished at this unexpected repulse, which seemed so inconsistent with what God's promises taught him to expect, the Jewish captain rent his clothes, and, with the elders of Israel, put dust upon his head, and lay prostrate before God in earnest prayer, during the whole day. But God gave him to understand that sin was the cause of this disaster; that no prayers could avail without repentance and reformation.

And the Lord said unto Joshua, Get thee up; wherefore liest thou on thy face? Israel hath sinned, and hath transgressed my covenant; therefore they could not stand before their enemies, because they were accursed; neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you. Now sin is the accursed thing, which always provokes Christ to depart from those who entertain it; and no entreaties will prevent his departure, unless this accursed thing be repented of and renounced.

Nay more, without this, he will not only withdraw his gracious presence, but will come out against us in anger; for his language to those who begin to decline from the way of truth is, I will come and fight against thee with the word of my mouth, except thou repent. 3. If we would prevent the Saviour from depriving us of his gracious visits, we must receive them with profound humility, and a deep sense of our unworthiness of such a favor. His visits are always designed to humble us; and so long as they produce this effect, he will continue them; for the High and Holy One, who inhabits eternity, dwells also with him who is of a humble and contrite heart.

But if we begin to grow proud of his favors; if we imagine that he blesses us with his presence, on account of any worthiness or excellence of our own; if we begin to look down with contempt on others, who are less favored, he will quickly withdraw, and leave us to shame; for while he gives grace to the humble, he sets himself against the proud to abase them. A striking instance of this we have in the story of Hezekiah. He had enjoyed many favors, had been delivered from the Assyrian army, miraculously raised from sickness, and made instrumental of a great revival of religion.

But, we are told, that Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him; but his heart was lifted up, therefore there was wrath upon Judah and Jerusalem. 4. If we would prevent the Saviour from leaving us, we must assign sufficient reasons why he should prolong his stay. He always does what is right and reasonable. No entreaties can induce him to act in an unreasonable manner; for he is not like weak-minded man who can often be persuaded to act contrary to his judgment.

But if we can assign any sufficient reasons for his continuance with us, he will infallibly prolong it, while those reasons continue to operate. We ought therefore, as Job expresses it, to fill our mouths with arguments, when we come to plead that he would not forsake us. The glory of his Father, the honor of his great name, the welfare of his people, the prosperity of his cause, are each of them reasons of sufficient weight to influence his conduct; and while either of these reasons requires his stay, we may be sure that he will not leave us. 5.

If we would prevent Christ from leaving us, we must furnish him with employments, and with such kind of employments as are suited to his character. Every intelligent being has some ruling passion, and every such being will choose to reside where that passion can be most easily and effectually gratified. For instance, the ruling passion of a miser is the love of wealth; and therefore, he will ever choose to reside where he can most easily acquire it. Now the ruling passion of our Saviour, is the love of doing good.

My meat, says he, is to do the will of my Father and to finish his work. And again he says, It is more blessed to give than to receive. Agreeably, we find that, when on earth he went about doing good, and, where he found opportunities of doing the most good, there he always made the longest stay; nor do we find that, in a single instance, he left any place until he had done all the good they would allow him to do, and had healed all who either came or were brought to him for that purpose.

If in any place he did not do many mighty works, it was because of their unbelief. It is the same still. Where he finds opportunities of doing the greatest good, there he ever best loves to stay. If then we would prolong his gracious visits, we must furnish him with opportunities of doing good, and keep him constantly employed in this blessed work. We must bring to him ourselves, our children, our friends and acquaintances, to be pardoned, instructed, sanctified, and saved. We must not leave him without employment for a single day; and if he begins to withdraw, we must lay the sick, the dying, and the dead across his path: for nothing will stop his departure, like such an obstacle as this.

Omnipotent as he is, he cannot step over a perishing soul, laid by faith, across his way. As unbelief can paralyze his arm, so faith can constrain him to work; and with gentle, but irresistible force, arrest his progress, even when he has began to withdraw. Such in brief, are the means which must be employed by those who wish to prevent the Saviour's departure. I proceed to notice, as was proposed, II. Some of the reasons which should induce us to employ these means. 1. We ought to employ these means because a neglect of them will infallibly grieve and offend our Redeemer.

Every being who is capable of feeling affection, wishes to have his attention returned; to have his favors received with thankfulness, to have his presence desired, to be beloved by those whom he loves and on the contrary, every one feels grieved and offended, when those whom he has loved, and loaded with benefits treats him with ingratitude and neglect, and manifest no desire for his presence. Now Christ has loved his people with an infinite and everlasting love; he has given them most convincing proofs of his affection; he has bestowed upon them blessings unspeakably valuable, and purchased at an infinite expense; he rejoices in the prospect of enjoying their society forever in those mansions which he has

prepared for their residence; and, therefore, he wishes them to desire and rejoice in his presence with them on earth; he wishes them to prefer it to every other object; and he therefore is, he must be grieved and displeased, when he sees that this is not the case; when he sees them neglect those means which have a tendency to prolong his gracious visits.

And say, my hearers, shall we willingly grieve and offend this best of friends? Has he not suffered enough from us already? Did we not grieve him sufficiently by our impenitence, our unbelief, and hardness of heart, before our conversion? Is it not enough that he is despised and neglected by an unbelieving world? Shall we, his professed disciples, unite with them to treat him with neglect? When he says to us, Will ye also go away, or compel me by your coldness and indifference to forsake you?

Shall we not reply, as with one voice, No, Lord, we will not leave thee, nor willingly suffer any thing to compel thee to leave us! 2. The blessed effects which result from the gracious visits of Christ, furnish another reason why we should employ all proper means, and make every possible exertion to induce him to prolong them. Consider a moment, my friends, what Christ is, what, he possesses, and what he does; and you will be convinced, at once, that nothing can be so beneficial, so desirable to any individual, place, or society, as his gracious presence.

He is the brightness of the Father's glory. In him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; his riches are unsearchable; he possesses all power in heaven and on earth; power to forgive sins; power to heal the spiritually sick, and raise the spiritually dead; power to open and shut the gates of heaven; power to bring good out of evil, and transform afflictions to blessings; power to bestow every temporal and spiritual good. He is also fully disposed to exert this power; and, wherever he is, he must exert it, for he is too benevolent to be idle.

His arm of everlasting strength is unceasingly prompted to beneficent exertion by a heart overflowing with boundless love. Say then, my friends, what blessing can be comparable to the gracious presence of such a being as this? It is indeed every blessing in one. It is an unspeakable gift. It is life, and light, and joy, and salvation. It is heaven, with all its treasures, poured out upon us at once in a boundless flood; for it is the presence of the Saviour which constitutes heaven.

And the effects which it produces are such as might naturally be expected from such a source. It fills the hearts of believers with joy and peace, their minds with knowledge, their life with praise and thanksgiving, and their hands with every good work. It sweetens every temporal blessing; it gives power and efficacy to all the means of grace; it promotes the cause of God and religion; it builds up and beautifies the church of Christ. To say all in a word, it produces the salvation of immortal souls.

But here the powers of language fail. No tongue can tell, no finite mind can conceive what is done, when only one immortal soul is rescued from eternal death, and made an heir of everlasting life. It is a truth, capable of mathematical demonstration, that the salvation of one such soul is of incomparably greater consequence, than the temporal happiness of the whole race of man. To say every thing that can be said, it is an event that causes joy in heaven, where there is fullness of joy; an event in which God, and Christ, and angels rejoice.

But the gracious presence of Christ never fails to produce and to multiply this event; to bring, not one only, but many, to repentance and salvation. Surely, then, we ought to employ every possible means to secure the presence of a being whose presence produces such effects as these. 3. Another reason which should induce us to employ these means, may be found in the evils which result from the Saviour's departure.

These evils are in full proportion to the benefits which result from his presence.

They respect, in the first place, the church of Christ. He is constituted head over all things to his church; and therefore the effects, which a church experiences on his departure from it, are similar to those which would result to a human body from the loss of its head. For instance, the head is the seat of intelligence, the palace, the presence-chamber of the soul, where she holds her court, and from whence she issues forth her counsels and commands to the members of the body.

Take away the head, and the tongue loses its eloquence, the right hand its cunning, and the feet their director. It is the same in the body of which Christ is the head. It has no wisdom, nor knowledge, nor intelligence without him. Its members know not what to do; they have, in a spiritual sense, neither eyes, nor ears, without their head and, therefore, infallibly wander, and stumble, and fall. We have no sufficiency of ourselves. Again. The head is the bond of union. Take away the head from a human body, and the members soon separate and moulder into dust.

So Christ is the only bond of union to his members. While he remains with them, they are firmly united; but when he departs, the connecting tie is broken; jealousies, dissensions, and divisions arise; the church becomes like a rope of sand; its members are easily separated and split into parties, and every one's heart, and hand, and tongue, is turned against his brother. Farther. The head is necessary to the growth of the body. Without the head, the body can receive no nourishment, and consequently no strength; its growth is immediately suspended.

It is the same with the body of Christ His presence always causes its increase both in numbers and in graces. But when he departs, its growth ceases. Spiritual nourishment is no longer received, and the whole body declines. Once more. The head is the seat of life and sensation. Take away the head, and death ensues. The body becomes insensible, as the clod of earth from which it was formed. It is the same with the church. Take away Christ, its head, its life, and it dies. Nothing remains, but a lifeless, insensible., putrefying carcass, fit only to produce and become food for worms.

Well therefore might the Saviour say to his disciples, Without me ye can do nothing; for as the body without the spirit is dead, so the church without Christ is also dead; and nothing but his return can restore it to life. Without his presence too, impenitent sinners must remain impenitent, and of course, inevitably perish; for if the living sicken and die, when he departs, it is evident that, without him, the dead will not arise to life. The means of grace may be employed, but they will have no effect; or rather, they will produce effects the most fatal.

They will become a savor of death unto death. Ministers may still labor, but it will be in vain; for, without Christ, Paul may plant, and Apollos water to no purpose. Sinners will die, one after another, and fall into the hands of that God who is a consuming fire; while their posterity will grow up, ignorant and vicious, to walk in the steps of their sinful parents, and finally share their fate. To say all in a word, the situation of a place, which the Saviour has finally forsaken, is such as the situation of the world would have been, if a Saviour had never been provided; or rather, it is worse; since they will have to answer for the unbelief which compelled him to depart.

Endeavor, my friends, to conceive, if you can, what would be the situation of our world without the sun. Every thing would speedily die; frost and darkness would seal up the earth, and nothing but sterility, and death, and eternal night, and endless winter would remain. Similar effects would result in the moral world from the final departure of Christ; for he is the Sun of Righteousness. There is no spiritual light, or warmth,

or life, or fertility without him; every heart, every habitation, every place of which he takes his final leave, is given up to night without day; to a winter without a spring; and nothing remains for such, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment.

The harvest being past, the summer ended, they will not, they cannot be saved. Now since such are the consequences of Christ's final departure, and since, whenever he departs, we know not that he will again return, ought we not, when we are favored with his gracious presence, to employ every possible means to induce him to continue it? 4. The conduct of impenitent sinners affords another reason why we should do this. They are continually doing every thing in their power to provoke the Saviour to leave the place where they reside.

Everyday, and especially every Sabbath, they do in effect by their unbelief, by their neglect of his gracious invitations, and their other sins, put the Saviour from them; and like the Gadarenes, urge him to depart. As often as he sees them in his house, he is constrained to look on them with grief, on account of the hardness of their hearts. Now since the enemies of Christ are thus constantly provoking him to leave us, it is evident that his friends ought to be proportionally diligent in endeavoring to prevent it, lest when he sees many wishing for his absence, and few or none earnestly desirous of his presence, he should withdraw, no more to return.

And now, my Christian friends, can any thing more be necessary to induce you to imitate the conduct of those mentioned in our text? We have as much reason to believe that the Saviour has been with us, as if we had seen him. The works which he has done among us, bear witness of him. We have also reason to hope that he is still with us; or, at least, that he has only begun to withdraw, that he may see whether we suitably prize his presence; whether we will follow him and urge his longer stay.

And can any who profess to love him be idle or unconcerned at such a time as this? Is it necessary to urge those who know the blessed effects of his presence better than we can describe them, to exert themselves for the purpose of preventing his departure? Will you not strive to banish from your hearts, from your houses, from the church, every thing which may provoke him to leave us? If he has not departed, we shall find him at his table. Let us then seek him there, and beseech him, and stay him, if possible, that he may not depart from us.

I need not tell you that we have great and unusual encouragement to do this. I need not tell you, that the present is a day of grace, of universal grace and bounty. It is confidently believed that never before, in the same space of time, were so many persons converted in this country, as within the last two years. Thousands, and perhaps ten thousands have been added to the church of Christ; and the number is rapidly augmenting. I have been informed by good authority that in one village in New England every person above the age of fifteen has become hopefully pious.

My friends, what Christ has done in other places he may do for us. His hand is not shortened. Nothing but our iniquities can provoke him to leave us. We are not straitened in him, but in ourselves. I am unwilling to dismiss this subject without saying something to my impenitent hearers; but what can I say to them? You do not realize the Saviour's presence. You do not feel your need of the blessings he offers; you do not desire his presence; you rather wish for, than dread his absence.

You will not accept his invitations, nor seek an interest in his favor. Even now you are about to depart from his table; and thus, in effect, you entreat him to depart from you. But pause, and reflect a moment. To what are the present religious appearances owing? What is it that excites hundreds and thousands, in all

parts of our country, to turn their attention to religion? You can see no cause, but there must be a cause, and a powerful one, to produce such effects. And can you prove that God is not the cause?

Do not effects which we witness strikingly correspond with our Saviour's description of the operation of his Spirit? The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth? So is every one who is born of the Spirit. Now, my friends, you hear the sound of this heavenly wind; you see its effects upon others; but feel little or nothing of them yourselves. And is it not important that you should feel them? If they are really the effects of God's Spirit, and if they are necessary to your salvation, it undoubtedly is so.

And, my friends, can any of you prove that they are not? You must prove this; you must prove that all Christians are deceived, that there is no such thing as experimental religion, that all which is said of spiritual illumination is a delusion, or become the subjects of them yourselves; or, dreadful alternative! take your place with the unclean, and the abominable, in that lake which burneth with fire!

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/edward-payson/how-to-prolong-the-gracious-visits-of-christ/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net