

Rev. 6:10. How Long?

by Horatius Bonar

The word 'How long?' in Scripture expresses a deep longing for God's deliverance and judgment, and a recognition of His sovereignty and long-suffering.

Scripture: Exodus 10:3, Psalm 6:3, Psalm 13:1, Psalm 35:17, Psalm 79:5, Jeremiah 4:14, Habakkuk 1:2, Matthew 24:3, 2 Peter 3:12, Revelation 6:10

Topics: "The Cry for Justice", "God's Patience and Long-suffering"

Description

Horatius Bonar explores the profound question 'How long?' as expressed in Revelation 6:10, emphasizing its significance in human experience and divine communication. He categorizes the cry into three main dialogues: from man to man, from man to God, and from God to man, illustrating the deep yearning for justice and understanding in a world filled with suffering and evil. Bonar highlights the themes of complaint, submission, inquiry, and expectation in the human cry, while also reflecting on God's long-suffering, admonition, and earnestness in His call to humanity. Ultimately, the sermon serves as a reminder of the hope and faith that believers hold onto as they await God's ultimate justice and redemption.

Transcript

"And they cried with a loud voice, saying--How long, O Lord, holy and true, do You not judge and avenge our blood on those who sell on the earth?"--Revelation 6:10.

The words 'How long?' occur frequently in Scripture, and are spoken in various ways--

- (1) As from man to man;
- (2) as from man to God;
- (3) as from God to man.

I. The passages in which the words are between man and man may be briefly noticed. They are such as, Job 8:2, 'How long will you speak these words?' 19:2, 'How long will you vex my soul?' Psalm 4:2, 'How long will you turn my glory to shame?' 63:3, 'How long will you imagine mischief against a man?' They are the complaint of the troubled against his troublers, and of the righteous against the wicked. Strange interchange of words between man and man! But we do not dwell on this. We come to the other two, in their order.

II. The words as from man to God. Looking up to God, man breathes the deep-drawn sigh, 'How long?' Let me note the chief passages--Psalm 6:3, 'My soul is sore vexed--but You, O Lord, how long?' Psalm 13:1, 'How long will You forget me, and hide Your face? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, and sorrow in my heart? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?' Psalm 35:17, 'How long will you look on?' Psalm 64:10, 'How long shall the adversary reproach?' Psalm 79:5, 'How long will You be angry?' Psalm 89:46, 'How long will You hide Yourself?' Psalm 90:13, 'Return, O Lord, how long?' Psalm 94:3-4, 'How long shall the wicked triumph?' Habakkuk 1:2, 'How long shall I cry?' Revelation 6:10, 'How long, O Lord, do You not judge and avenge our blood?' These are the chief passages in which the expression occurs. Instead of dwelling on each of these in succession, let me thus sum up and classify their different meanings. It is the language of--

(1) Complaint. It is not murmuring or fretting--yet it is what the Psalmist calls 'complaining.' The righteous man feels the burden and the sorrow and the evil that have so long prevailed in this present evil world, and he cries, "How long?" Have these not lasted long enough? Would that they were done! In this complaint there is weariness, and sometimes there is sadness--almost despair--when unbelief gets the upper hand. Creation groans. Iniquity overflows. Death reigns. The wicked triumph. God seems to forget the earth and to hide His face. The saint "groans within himself, waiting for the adoption, the redemption of the body." 'Woe is me,' he says 'that I dwell in Mesech!' Yes, we that yet are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened. We daily cry, 'How long?' We are oppressed, and oftentimes cast down. We are not desponding--yet we cannot laugh with the world.

(2) Submission. While impatience sometimes rises, yet the cry does not mean this. It is really a cry of submission to a wise and sovereign God. It is the cry of one putting all events, as well as all times and seasons, into His hands, as Jesus did in Gethsemane. When we pray for deliverance, or plead for the Lord's coming, we do not mean to be impatient--but simply to utter our weariness--to unbosom ourselves to a gracious God. While we say--How long? We say also--Not my will, but Yours be done. We utter our own conscious helplessness, and put all into the hands of God.

(3) Inquiry. In all the passages there is an implied question. It is not merely--Oh that the time would come! But--When shall it come? We may not 'know the time how long,' but we ask earnestly, with the prophet--How long shall it be to the end of these wonders? We are warranted in asking, for God has given the prophetic word, that our inquiries may be stimulated and directed. The disciples inquired, and Christ answered fully (Matthew 24:3,4).

(4) Expectation. It is the voice of faith, and hope, and longing desire. The present is dark, the future is bright. God's word is sure concerning the coming glory; and so we, looking for and hastening to that glory, and depressed with the evil here, cry out day by day, 'How long?' When will the day dawn? When will the kingdom come? When will the glory break forth? Faith hears the voice of the Beloved, and says, 'Make haste;' it hears His 'Behold, I come quickly!' and it says, 'Even so, come, Lord Jesus!' We 'look for and hasten (unto) the coming of the day of God' (2 Peter 3:12).

III. The words as from God to man. I note the following instances--Exodus 10:3, 16:28, 'How long will you refuse to humble yourself?' Joshua 18:3, 'How long will you be slack to go in the possess the land?' 1 Kings 18:21, 'How long halt you between two opinions?' Psalm 82:2, 'How long will you judge unjustly?' Proverbs 1:22, 6:9, 'How long, you simple ones, will you love simplicity?' Jeremiah 4:14, 'O Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness, that you may be heard--how long shall your vain thoughts lodge within you?'

Taking up these words of God as spoken to different classes, we would dwell on the following points--

1. Long-suffering. Jeremiah's words to Jerusalem are the words of a patient God, 'not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.' He is the infinitely patient God, as such most unwilling to smite. He speaks in pity to the sinner, 'how long will you not be saved?'--like Jesus weeping over Jerusalem.
2. Admonition. How long halt you between two opinions? How long shall you be of deciding? How long of trusting me? How long will you treat me as a false God, and do injustice to my grace?
3. Entreaty. How long, you simple ones, will you love simplicity? God beseeches man. He entreats him to give up his sin--to come and be saved. How long will you refuse my love?
4. Earnestness. God's words are all sincere. They are not the language of duplicity or pretense. He means what He says, and He says what He means. 'You will not come to me!' 'How often would I have gathered your children!' 'O that you had known!'
5. Sorrow. It is not at random that God says, 'How long?' His are not mere words of course. 'It grieves Him at His heart.' Every moment's continuance in unbelief is vexing and grieving the Spirit.
6. Upbraiding. As He upbraided Israel with being slack to go in and possess the land, so He upbraids us. There is the land, the kingdom, why do you not go in? The door is open--the way is clear.
7. Warning. As He warned the judges and princes in Israel, so does He warn us. How long will you deal unjustly? He said to them. How long will you persist in your unrighteousness and unbelief? He says to us. The day of grace is ending. The day of wrath is coming. Be warned. Flee from the wrath to come!

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