

Hindrances to a Heavenly Life on Earth

by Richard Baxter

Richard Baxter emphasizes the various hindrances to living a heavenly life on earth, urging believers to avoid sin, pride, and complacency while fostering humility and effort in their spiritual journey.

Scripture: Matthew 6:13

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Heavenly Living"

Description

Richard Baxter preaches about the hindrances to living a heavenly life on earth, warning against known sin, an earthly mind, ungodly company, disputes about lesser truths, a proud spirit, laziness, and contentment with mere preparation for a heavenly life. He emphasizes the importance of avoiding these hindrances to truly experience communion with God and live a life focused on heavenly contemplation and humility.

Transcript

If you value a heavenly life upon earth, I must charge you to avoid some dangerous hindrances.

LIVING IN ANY KNOWN SIN is a great impediment to a heavenly life. If this be your situation, I dare say that heaven and your soul are strangers. These beams in your eye (Matthew 7:4) will not let you look to heaven. They will be a cloud between you and God. When you attempt to study eternity and gather refreshment from the life to come, your sin will look you in the face and say, "These things do not belong to you." How can you take comfort from heaven when you take so much pleasure in the lusts of the flesh? Every intentional sin will be to your happiness as water to the fire. It will quench your joy. It will disable you, so that you can no more ascend in divine meditation than a bird can fly with clipped wings. We surely need to pray daily, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (Matt. 6:13).

AN EARTHLY MIND is another hindrance to be avoided. When the heavenly believer is rejoicing in hope of the glory to come, perhaps you are blessing yourself with thoughts of worldly prosperity. You are rejoicing in hopes of earthly success. When he is comforting his soul with the views of Christ, of angels and saints, with whom he shall live forever; you are comforting yourself with your money, and in thinking of the advancement of your family. Your earthly mind may coexist with church membership and formal religious activities, but it cannot coexist with heavenly contemplation. Keep worldly matters as loose as a light jacket, that you may take it off whenever you can; but let God and heaven be next to your heart. Ever remember, that "the friendship of the world is enmity with God. Whoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (James 4:4). "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any

man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15). This is plain speaking, and happy is he who faithfully receives it.

BEWARE OF THE COMPANY OF THE UNGODLY. Of course, I would not dissuade you from necessary dealings with the ungodly, nor from helping them, and certainly not from endeavoring to draw them to God when you have opportunity. It is the unnecessary fellowship with the ungodly from which I would dissuade you. Chiefly to be avoided are the profane, the swearer, the drunkard, and the enemies of godliness. But they are not the only ones who will prove harmful companions to us. Too frequent fellowship with people whose conversation is empty, will also divert our thoughts from heaven. We need all the help we can get in living the heavenly life on earth.

A stone is as fit to rise and fly in the air, as our hearts are by nature to move towards heaven. You need not hinder the rocks from flying up to the sky. It is sufficient that you do not help them. Just as surely, if our spirits have not great assistance, they may easily be kept from soaring upwards even without great hindrances. Consider this in the choice of your company. What help will it be to your spiritual life to hear about the weather or the latest news? This is the conversation of earthlings. How will it help to raise your heart to God, to hear about an excellent book, or an able minister, or of some petty controversy? This is mainly the best conversation you are likely to hear from the formal, dead-hearted church member. Can you have your hearts in heaven while among your roaring companions in a bar, or when you work with those whose common language is profanity, filthiness, foolishness, and dirty jokes? No, the plain fact is, fellowship will be a part of our happiness in heaven; and it is now either a help or hindrance in living a heavenly life on earth.

AVOID FREQUENT DISPUTES ABOUT LESSER TRUTHS, and religion that lies only in opinions. He whose religion is all in his opinions, will be most frequently and enthusiastically mouthing them; but he whose religion lies in the knowledge and love of God, will be most delightfully speaking of that happy time when he shall enjoy them. The least controversial points are usually the most important and most necessary for our souls. "Foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes. And the servant of the Lord must not strive" (2 Tim. 2:23-24). "Avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain" (Titus 3:9).

TAKE HEED OF A PROUD AND LOFTY SPIRIT. If such a spirit cast the angels out of heaven, it must keep your heart from heaven. Communion with God will keep people humble, and that humility will also promote their communion. When a man is absorbed in the study of God's glorious characteristics, he scorns himself. That self-humiliation is his best preparation for obtaining admittance to God again. Therefore, after a soul-humbling day, or in times of trouble when the soul is lowest, it has freest access to God. "God resists the proud, but gives grace unto the humble" (James 4:6).

Are you delighted when you hear of your popularity, and depressed when you hear that others criticize you? Do you love those best that honor you? Is your anger kindled if your will is crossed? Can you serve God in a low place as well as a high? Are you unacquainted with the deceitfulness and wickedness of your heart? Are you more ready to defend yourself than accuse yourself and confess your fault? Can you scarcely take criticism? If these symptoms persist in your life, you are a proud person. There is too much of hell abiding in you to have any acquaintance with heaven. Your soul is too much like the devil to have any close fellowship with God. A proud man makes himself his god, and sets up himself as his idol. I am saying so much about this, because it is such a common and dangerous sin.

O Christian, if you would live continually in the presence of your Lord, get down on your knees in humility. Learn of Him to be meek and lowly, and you will "find rest unto your souls" (Matt. 11:29). As he that humbles himself as a little child shall hereafter be greatest in the kingdom of heaven, so shall he now be greatest in the foretastes of that kingdom. Therefore, "humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up" (James 4:10).

A LAZY SPIRIT is another impediment to this heavenly life. Reader, heaven is above you. Do you do you think can climb this steep ascent without effort and determination? Can you get that earthly heart to heaven, and bring that backward mind to God, while you take it easy? Lying down at the foot of the hill, and looking towards the top and wishing you were there, won't do it. You talk, and trifle, and live at your ease, and say, "O that I could get my heart to heaven!" How many people read books and hear sermons, expecting to hear of some easier way. They ask for directions to a heavenly life; and if hearing will be sufficient, they will be heavenly Christians. But if we show them their work, and tell them they cannot have these delights on easier terms, then they leave us, as the young man left Christ, sorrowful (Matthew 19:22).

It was the custom of the ancient Parthians not to give their children any breakfast until they saw the sweat on their faces from some work. You shall find this to be God's usual way, not to give His children the tastes of His delicacies until they begin to perspire in seeking them.

A subtle hindrance to the heavenly life is CONTENTMENT WITH THE MERE PREPARATION for it. When we are satisfied with merely studying of heavenly things, or of talking with one another about them, we miss the life itself. None are more in danger of this trap than those who are employed in leading the devotions of others, especially preachers of the Gospel. O, how easily may such be deceived! While they read and study of heaven, preach and pray and talk of heaven--is this not the heavenly life? Unfortunately, all this is only preparation. This is only collecting the materials, not erecting the building itself, let alone dwelling in it. As he that sits at home may draw exact maps of countries, and yet never see them nor travel towards them, so may you describe to others the joys of heaven, and yet never come near it yourself. This temptation is so subtle because studying and preaching about heaven does resemble a heavenly life more than does thinking and talking about the world. This is apt to deceive us. This is to die for thirst while we draw water for others.

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