

# The Title to the Saints' Rest

by Richard Baxter

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*To know your title to heaven, you must engage in self-examination, taking God as your primary good and accepting Christ as your only Savior and Lord.*

**Scripture:** Acts 16:31, 2 Corinthians 13:5, 1 Peter 3:15, 2 Peter 1:10, Revelation 2:17

**Topics:** "Assurance Of Salvation", "Self Examination"

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## Description

Richard Baxter preaches about the importance of self-examination to attain certainty of salvation. He highlights how many neglect to secure their title to the glorious rest awaiting God's people, despite eagerly seeking assurance in other aspects of life. Baxter emphasizes that true trust in God involves actively examining and ruling our hearts by Scripture, rather than passively leaving everything to God. He warns against hindrances like Satan's deception, worldly influences, and false hope that prevent believers from self-examination and blessed assurance.

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## Transcript

If there is such a glorious rest awaiting only the people of God, why do most people neglect the certainty of their title to it? What strange madness is it that allows people to live happily while uncertain of their destiny? I would think that we would want above all else to be fully assured of our being heirs of the kingdom. If a person has a law suit against him, how anxious he is to know whether it will go for or against him. If a person is to be tried for his life in an earthly court, how eager he is to know whether he will be acquitted or condemned. If a person is dangerously ill, he will inquire, of the physician, "What do you think; shall I live or not?" But in the supreme matter of salvation, many are content to be uncertain.

If you ask of most men "a reason of the hope that is in them, (1 Peter 3:15) they will say, "Because God is merciful." If God or man should say to one of them, "Friend, what is the state of your soul? Is it born again and forgiven?" He would answer like Cain, "I know not; am I my soul's keeper?" His flippancy attitude is, "I'll leave it all to God." That is like a skipper saying, "I will trust God with my ship and leave it to the rocks and waves and winds." What horrible abuse of God this is, to pretend to trust God, while covering up our own voluntary negligence. If you really trusted God, you would also be ruled by Him, and trust Him in His own appointed way. Wouldn't he be a foolish traveler who would stay on a certain road when he does not know whether it is the right road, and comfort himself by saying, "I hope I am right; I will go on, and trust in God?"

No wonder you are an enemy to plain preaching. No wonder you say of the minister, as Ahab of the prophet Elijah, "I hate him; for he does not prophesy good concerning me, but evil" (1 Kings 22:8).

The way to conquer uncertainty is self-examination. It is the serious and sincere trying of a person's life by the rule of Scripture. Go through a congregation of a thousand members, and how few of them will you find that ever spent one hour in all their lives in a close examination of their title to heaven. Ask your own conscience, reader, when was the time, and where was the place, that you ever solemnly took your heart to task, and examined it by Scripture? Did you ever find out if it was really renewed or not, whether it was truly holy or not, whether it cared most for God or lesser things, whether it was focused more on heaven or earth? Did you follow up this examination and pass sentence on yourself accordingly?

Scripture shows that the certainty of salvation may be attained. We ought to know if we are saved. Scripture bids us "give diligence to make our calling and election sure" (2 Pet. 1:10); and earnestly urges us to examine, prove, and know our own selves, whether we be in the faith and whether Jesus Christ be in us, or we be reprobates (2 Cor. 13:5).

Among the many hindrances which keep men from self-examination, SATAN will do his part. He doesn't want the godly to have the joy, assurance, and strength against temptation, which the faithful performance of self-examination would provide. As for the ungodly, he knows how to angle for souls better than to show them the hook and line, or frighten them away with a noise, or with his own appearance. Therefore he works secretly to keep them from examining themselves.

Some scoff at self-examination. "What," say they, "do you doubt your salvation, when you have lived so well, and done nobody any harm? God is merciful. If such as you are not saved, what will become of all your friends and neighbors who live as you do?" So the WORLD cries, "Don't worry about these things." Consider, however, that it is Christ, and not your neighbors or friends, that must judge you at last. If Christ condemns you, these people cannot save you. Therefore, it is not from the words of ignorant men, but from the Word of God, that you should gain your hope of salvation.

The greatest hindrances are in men's OWN HEARTS. Some are so ignorant that they don't know what self-examination is. They don't realize there is any important difference between one person and another, but think that we are all Christians. Some are so full of self-love and pride, that they will not even suspect they are in danger. They are like pampering parents who will not believe that their spoiled children could do any wrong. Some are so in love with sin, and so dislike the way of God, that they don't dare examine themselves, lest they be forced to change. Some are so resolved never to change their present way of living that they neglect self-examination as useless. They would rather risk eternity than seek a new way. Many are so busy in the world that they cannot take the time to test their title to heaven. Some are so lazy that they will not be bothered with it. But the most common and dangerous obstruction is 'false hope' which keeps a person from suspecting his danger.

As in a house where nothing is in its proper place, it will be difficult to find what is needed, so it is in the heart where all things are in disorder. It is difficult for a person to examine himself impartially. Like a bribed judge who has already made up his mind which way the case shall go, people are partial to their own cause. They think their great sins small, and overlook their small sins completely.

Some hindrances keep even true Christians from blessed assurance. Sometimes they mistake assurance for the joy that commonly accompanies it. If they don't feel the joy, they fear they don't have the salvation. This is like a child who thinks himself a son only while he sees the smiles of his father's face, or hears the

comforting words of his mouth. Does he cease to be the child of his father, just because the father's smiles and soft words cease?

Christians need to realize that their comfort comes from the promises of God. They must draw comfort as often as they need it, by daily and diligently meditating upon the promises.

Another cause of distress is the secret harboring of some known sin. God has put a gulf between sin and peace. As long as you cherish your pride, your love of the world, the desires of the flesh, or any unchristian practice, you won't feel the comforting peace of God within.

Grace is only apparent to the soul while it is in action. When it is not in action it is like a musical instrument, well tuned, but making no more music than a piece of wood lying alone. When it is played by a skillful musician, the melody is delightful. So also, some degree of comfort follows every good action, as heat accompanies fire. A man that is spiritually cold should work until heat be kindled; so he that lacks assurance must not stand still, but exercise his graces until his doubts vanish.

The lack of assurance in the soul is sometimes caused by physical weakness. A conscientious Christian, while under mental depression or physical weakness, may doubt, despair, and fear. This is no more unusual than for a sick man to groan, or a child to cry when spanked. The physician may be needed instead of the pastor, when people cry out about sin and the wrath of God, while the chief cause is their physical or mental illness.

Faithful self-examination will have pleasant results. Isn't it desirable to know what will come to us hereafter, and what place and state we must be in forever? What sweet thoughts you will have of God. All His power and justice which is the terror of others will be your joy. How welcome will the Word of God be to you. How sweet will His promises be when you are sure they are your own. The very threatenings will comfort you, to remember that you have escaped them. What boldness you may then have in prayer, when you can say, "Our Father," in full assurance. It will make the Lord's Supper a refreshing feast to your soul. How lively will it make you in the work of the Lord.

Perhaps you say, "I don't know how to examine myself." I am now going to give you some DIRECTIONS.

Bow down before God in sincere prayer, desiring the assistance of His Spirit to show you the plain truth of your condition.

Choose the most convenient time and place. Let the place be the most private, and the time when you have nothing to interrupt you; and, if possible, let it be the present time.

Have available, either in memory or writing, some Scriptures, containing the descriptions of the saints and the gospel terms of salvation.

Proceed then to put the question to yourself. If your heart tries to escape the work, force it on.

When you have discovered your true condition, pass sentence on yourself accordingly; either that you are a true Christian, or that you are not. Don't pass sentence rashly, either with self-flattery or with pessimistic perfectionism.

Write this sentence, at least in your memory--"At such a time, upon thorough examination, I found my condition to be such and such." Such a record will be very useful to you hereafter.

Now let me add two criteria by which you may determine your title to the saints' everlasting rest. First, taking God for your primary good; and secondly, accepting Christ for your only Savior and Lord. Every soul that has a title to this rest places his chief happiness in God. This rest consists in the full enjoyment of God. Do you truly consider it to be your primary happiness to enjoy the Lord in glory? Though the flesh will be pleading for its own delights, and the world will be creeping into your affections, yet in your prevailing judgment and true interests, do you prefer God above all things in the world? Do you make Him the very aim of your desires and efforts?

If God should set before you an eternity of earthly pleasure on the one hand, and the saints' rest on the other, and invite you to take your choice, would you refuse the world and choose this rest? Or, do you prefer in your heart, worldly happiness before God? Though your tongue may say that God is your chief happiness, yet your heart may not so esteem Him; for the world may truly be the principle aim of your desires and efforts. The life to come may have little of your care or work. You are not attracted to the unseen glory of another world, nor would you do anything at all for heaven if you knew how to keep the world. If God would give you permission to live on the earth with health and wealth forever, you would think it better than heaven's rest. If this is your condition, then you are still an unregenerate person. You are not born again, and you have no title to the saints' rest.

As you take God for your chief good, so you must sincerely accept Christ for your only Savior and Lord, to bring you to this heavenly rest. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved" (Acts 16:31). Do you sincerely consent that Christ alone shall be your Savior? Have you stopped trusting in your works to save you? Are you trusting in the redemption made by Christ? Are you also content to take Him for your only Lord and King, to govern and guide you by His laws and Spirit? Are you willing to obey Him even when He commands the hardest of duties and those which are most contrary to the desires of your flesh? Are you sorry when you break your resolution, but happy when you stay in close obedience to Him? Would you not change your Lord and Master for all the world? This is the way it is with every true Christian.

But if you are a hypocrite, then it is different. You may call Christ your Lord and Savior, but you never found yourself so lost without Him as to drive you to seek Him and trust Him, and to lay your salvation on Him alone. At least, you never sincerely consented that He should govern you as your Lord. Of course, you are willing to be saved from hell by Christ when you die; but, in the meantime, you don't want Him to command you anymore than will agree with your pleasures and worldly desires.

Observe, it is the consent of the heart, or will, which I ask you to examine. I do not ask whether you have assurance of salvation. I do not even ask whether you can believe that your sins are pardoned. These are not a part of justifying faith. They are the fruits of it. They are results of faith. Do not say, "I cannot believe that my sins are pardoned, and therefore I am not a true Christian." This is a most common mistake. The question is, whether you sincerely accept Christ in order that you may be pardoned, reconciled to God, and so saved. Do you consent that He shall be your Lord who has bought you, and that He shall bring you to heaven in His own way? This is justifying, saving faith. This is the test by which to examine yourself. Yet still observe that all this consent must be sincere and real, not pretended or acted out with reservations.

If Christians want comforts that will not deceive them, let them make it the endeavor of their lives to grow in grace, to strengthen and increase the interest of Christ in their souls. The promise is not to every one that presumes to believe, but "to him that overcomes, will Christ give to eat of the hidden manna" (Rev. 2:17). He shall eat "of the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God" (Rev. 2:7), and "shall not

be hurt of the second death" (Rev. 2:11). He will grant to him to sit with him on His throne, even as He also overcame, and is set down with His Father on His throne (Revelation 3:21).

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