

Eleven Degrees of Resting in Duties

by Thomas Shepard

The sermon emphasizes the importance of resting in faith in Jesus Christ for salvation, rather than relying on good works, reformation, or repentance.

Scripture: Matthew 7:21, Romans 3:20, Galatians 2:16, Ephesians 2:8, Titus 3:5

Topics: "False Salvation", "True Faith"

Description

Thomas Shepard preaches about the various ways people try to find salvation apart from true faith in Christ, such as relying on superstitious practices, token professions of religion, good works, inner goodness, reformation, repentance, morality, zeal for good causes, and self-effort. He warns against resting in these false hopes and emphasizes the need for genuine faith in Jesus Christ for salvation, highlighting the danger of trusting in one's own efforts or righteousness. Shepard also points out the tendency for some Christians to approach salvation like the Papists, seeking to earn their way to heaven through works and self-improvement rather than relying solely on the grace of Christ.

Transcript

This resting in duties appears in these eleven degrees:--

1. The soul of a poor sinner, if ignorantly bred and brought up, rests confidently in superstitious vanities. Ask a devout Papist how he hopes to be saved; he will answer, by his good works. But inquire, further, What are these good works? Why, for the most part, superstitious ones of their own inventions, (for the crow thinks her own bird fairest,) as whipping themselves, pilgrimage, fasting, mumbling over their Paternosters, bowing down to images and crosses.

2. Now, these being banished from the church and kingdom, then men stand upon their token profession of the true religion, although they be devils incarnate in their lives. Look up and down the kingdom; you shall see some roaring, drinking, dicing, carding, whoring, in taverns and blind alehouses; others belching out their oaths, their mouths ever casting out, like raging seas, filthy, frothy speeches; others, like Ismaels, scoffing at the best men; yet these are confident they shall be saved. Why, (say they,) they are no Papists; hang them, they will die for their religion, and rather burn than turn again, by the grace of God. Thus the Jews boasted they were Abraham's seed; so our carnal people boast: Am not I a good Protestant? Am not I baptized? Do I not live in the church? And therefore, resting here, hope to be saved. I remember a judge, when one pleaded once with him for his life, that he might not be hanged because he was a gentleman; he told him that therefore he should have the gallows made higher for him: so when you plead, I am a

Christian and a good Protestant, (yet you wilt drink, and swear, and whore, neglect prayer, and break God's Sabbath,) and therefore you hope to be saved; I tell you your condemnation shall be greater, and the plagues in hell the heavier.

3. If men have no peace here, then they fly to, and rest in, the goodness of their insides. You will have many a man, whom, if you follow to his chamber, you shall find very devout; and they pray heartily for the mercy of God, and forgiveness of sins; but follow them out of their chambers, watch their discourses, you shall find it frothy and vain, and now and then powdered with faith and fidelity, and obscene speeches. Watch them when they are offended, you shall see them as angry as wasps, and swell like turkeys, and so spit out their venom like dragons. Watch them in their journeys, and you shall see them shoot into an alehouse, and there swill and swagger, and be familiar with the scum of the country for profaneness, and half drunk, too, sometimes. Watch them on the Lord's day; take them out of the church once, and set aside their best clothes, and they are then the same as at another time; and, because they must not work nor sport that day, they think they may with a good conscience sleep the longer on the morning. Ask, now, such men how they hope to be saved, seeing their lives are so bad; they say, though they make not such shows, they know what good prayers they make in private; their hearts, they say, are good. I tell you, brethren, he that trusts to his own heart and his good desires, and so rests in them, is a fool. I have heard of a man that would haunt the taverns, and theaters, and whore houses at London all day; but he would not dare to go forth without private prayer in a morning, and then would say, at his departure, Now, devil, do your worst; and so used his prayers (as many do) only as charms and spells against the poor, weak, cowardly devil, that they think dares not hurt them, so long as they have good hearts within them, and good prayers in their chambers; and hence they will go near to rail against the preacher as a harsh master, if he do not comfort them with this--that God accepts of their good desires.

4. If their good hearts can not quiet them, but conscience tells them they are unsound without, and rotten at core within, then men fall upon reformation; they will leave their whoring, drinking, cheating, gaming, company-keeping, swearing, and such like roaring sins; and now all the country says he is become a new man, and he himself thinks he shall be saved; (2 Pet. 2:20;) they escape the pollutions of the world, as swine that are escaped and washed from outward filth; yet the swinish nature remains still; like mariners that are going to some dangerous place, ignorantly, if they meet with storms, they go not backward, but cast out their goods that endanger their ship, and so go forward still; so many a man, going toward hell, is forced to cast out his lusts and sins; but he goes on in the same way still for all that. The wildest beasts, (as stags,) if they be kept waking from sleep long, will grow tame; so conscience giving a man no rest for some sins he lives in, he grows tame: he that was a wild gentleman before remains the same man still, only he is made tame now; that is, civil and smooth in his whole course; and hence they rest in reformation, which reformation is, commonly, but from some troublesome sin, and it is because they think it is better following their trade of sin at another market; and hence some men will leave their drinking and whoring, and turn covetous, because there is more gain at that market; sometimes it is because sin has left them, as an old man.

5. If they can have no rest here, they get into another avenue: they go to their humiliations, repentings, tears, sorrows, and confessions. They hear a man can not be saved by reforming his life, unless he come to afflict his soul too; he must sorrow and weep here, or else cry out in hell hereafter. Hereupon they betake themselves to their sorrows, tears, confession of sins; and now the wind is down, and the tempest is over, and they make themselves safe. They would have repented; that is, the heathen, as Beza speaks, when any wrath was kindled from Heaven, they would go to their sackcloth and sorrows, and so thought to

pacify God's anger again; and here they rested. So it is with many a man; many people have sick fits and qualms of conscience, and then they do as crows, that give themselves a vomit by swallowing down some stone when they are sick, and then they are well again; so when men are troubled for their sins, they will give themselves a vomit of prayer, a vomit of confession and humiliation. (Isaiah 58:5.) Hence many, when they can get no good by this medicine, by their sorrows and tears, cast off all again; for, making these things their God and their Christ, they forsake them when they can not save them. (Matt. 3:7.) More are driven to Christ by the sense of the burden of a hard, dead, blind, filthy heart than by the sense of sorrows, because a man rests in the one, that is to say, in sorrows, most commonly, but trembles and flies out of himself when he feels the other. Thus men rest in their repentance; and therefore Augustine has a pretty saying which sounds harsh, that repentance damns more than sin; meaning that thousands did perish by resting in it; and hence we see, among many people, if they have great feelings, they think they are in good favor; if they lack them, they think they are castaways, when they can not mourn nor be affected as once they were, because they rest in them.

6. If they have no rest here, then they turn moral men; that is, strict in all the duties of the moral law, which is a greater matter than reformation or humiliation; that is, they grow very just and square in their dealings with men, and exceeding strict in the duties of the first table toward God, as fasting, prayer, hearing, reading, observing the Sabbath: and thus the Pharisees lived, and hence they are called "the strict sect of the Pharisees." Take heed you mistake me not; I speak not against strictness, but against resting in it; for except your righteousness exceed theirs, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. You shall find these men fly from base persons and places, like the pest houses, commend the best books, cry down the sins of the time, and cry against civil or moral men, (the eye sees not itself,) and cry up zeal and forwardness. Talk with him about many moral duties that are to be done toward God or man, he will speak well about the excellency and necessity of it, because his trade and skill, whereby he hopes to get his living and earn eternal life, lies there; but speak about Christ, and living by faith in him and from him, and grounding the soul upon the promises, (pieces of evangelical righteousness,) he that is very skillful in any point of controversy is as ignorant almost as a beast, when he is examined here. Hence, if ministers preach against the sins of the time, they commend it for a special sermon, (as it haply deserves, too;) but let him speak of any spiritual, inward, soul-working points, they go away and say he was in their judgment confused and obscure; for their part they understood him not. (Beloved,) pictures are pretty things to look on, and that is all the goodness of them; so these men are, (as Christ looked on and loved the natural young man in the gospel,) and that is all their excellency. You know, in Noah's flood, all that were not in the ark, though they did climb and get to the top of the tallest mountains, they were drowned; so labor to climb never so high in morality, and the duties of both tables, if you enter not into God's ark, the Lord Jesus Christ, you are sure to perish eternally.

7. If they have no rest here in their morality, they grow hot within, and turn marvellously zealous for good causes and courses; and there they stay and warm themselves at their own fire: thus Paul (Phil. 3:6) was zealous, and there rested. They will not live, as many do, like snails in their shells, but rather than they will be damned for want of doing, they are content to give away their estate, children, any thing almost, to get pardon for the sin of their soul. (Micah 6:7.)

8. If they find no help from hence, but are forced to see and say, when they have done all, they are unprofitable servants, and they sin in all that which they do, then they rest in that which is like to evangelical obedience; they think to please God by mourning for their failings in their good duties, desiring to be better, and promising for the time to come to be so, and therein rest. (Deut. 5:29.)

9. If they feel a lack of all these, then they dig within themselves for power to leave sin, power to be more holy and humble, and so think to work out themselves, in time, out of this estate, and so they dig for pearls in their own dunghills, and will not be beholding to the Lord Jesus; to live on him in the want of all; they think to set up themselves out of their own stock, without Jesus Christ, and so, as the prophet Hosea speaks (14:3,4), think to save themselves, by their riding on horses, that is, by their own abilities.

10. If they feel no help here, then they go unto Christ for grace and power to leave sin and do better, whereby they may save themselves; and so they live upon Christ, that they may live of themselves; they go unto Christ, they get not into Christ (Psalm 78:34,35), like hirelings that go for power to do their work, that they may earn their wages. A child of God contents himself with, and lives upon, the inheritance itself the Lord in his free mercy has given him.

But now we shall see many poor Christians that run in the very road the Papists devoutly go to hell in.

First. The Papist will confess his misery, that he is (and all men are) by nature a child of wrath, and under the power of sin and Satan.

Secondly. They hold Christ is the only Saviour.

Thirdly. That this salvation is not by any righteousness in a Christ, but righteousness from a Christ, only by giving a man power to do, and then dipping men's doings in his blood, he merits their life. Thus the wisest and most devoted of them profess, as I am able to manifest; just so do many Christians live. First. They feel themselves full of sin, and are sometimes tired and weary of themselves, for their vile hearts, and they find no power to help themselves. Secondly. Hereupon hearing that only Christ can save them, they go unto Christ to remove these sins that tire them, and load them, that he would enable them to do better than formerly. Thirdly. If they get these sins subdued and removed, and if they find power to do better, then they hope they shall be saved: whereas you may be damned, and go to the devil at the last, although you should escape all the pollutions of the world, and that not from thyself and strength, but from the knowledge of Jesus Christ. (2 Pet. 2:20.) I say, woe to you forever if you die in this estate; it is with our Christians in this case as it is with the ivy, which clasps and grows about the tree, and draws sap from the tree, but it grows not one with the tree, because it is not engrafted into the tree; so many a soul comes to Christ, to suck juice from Christ to maintain his own berries, (his own stock of grace:) alas! He is but ivy, he is no member or branch of this tree, and hence he never grows to be one with Christ.

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