

Signs of Resting in Duties

by Thomas Shepard

Thomas Shepard warns against resting in duties, emphasizing the importance of seeking evangelical righteousness and coming to Christ.

Scripture: Romans 3:20, Galatians 2:16, Ephesians 2:8, Philippians 3:8, Titus 3:5

Topics: "Self Righteousness", "Saving Grace"

Description

Thomas Shepard preaches about the danger of resting in religious duties for salvation, highlighting the signs that indicate one is relying on their own works rather than on Christ for redemption. He emphasizes the importance of not finding security in the mere performance of duties but in a genuine relationship with Jesus. Shepard warns against the deception of self-righteousness and the tendency to trust in one's own efforts rather than in the saving grace of Christ.

Transcript

But because it is hard for to know when a man rests in duties, and few men find themselves guilty of this sin, which ruins so many, I will show two things:--

1. The signs of a man's resting in duties.
2. The insufficiency of all duties to save men; that so those that be found guilty of this sin may not go on in it.

First. For the signs whereby a man may certainly know, when he rests in his duties, which if he do, (as few professors especially but they do,) he will perish eternally.

First. Those that yet never saw they rested in them, they that never found it a hard matter to come out of their duties. For it is most natural for a man to stick in them, because nature sets men upon duties; hence it is a hard matter to come out of resting in duties. For two things keep a man from Christ:--

1. Sin. 2. Self. Now, as a man is broken off from sin by seeing and feeling it, and groaning under the power of it, so is a man broken from himself. For men had rather do any thing than come unto Christ, there is such a great deal of self in them. Therefore, if you have no experience, that at no time you have rested too much in your duties, and then did groan to be delivered from these entanglements, (I mean not from the doing of them,--this is presumption and profaneness,--but from resting in the bare performance of them,) you indeed rely upon your duties to this day.

These rest in duties, that prize the bare performance of duties wonderfully; for those duties that carry you out of yourself unto Christ make you to prize Christ. Now, tell me, do you glory in yourself? Now I am somebody. I was ignorant, forgetful, hardhearted; now I understand, and remember better, and can sorrow for my sins: if you do rest here, your duties never carried you farther than yourself. Do you think, after that you have prayed with some life, Now I have done very well, and now you verily think (meaning for your duties) the Lord will save you, though you never come to Christ, and say, as he in another case, "Now I hope the Lord will do good to me, seeing I have got a priest into my house." (Judges 17:13) Do you enhance the price of duties thus, that you so dote on them? Then I do pronounce from God, you are resting in them. "These things" (says Paul) "I counted gain," (that is, before his conversion to Christ, he prized them exceedingly,) but "now I account them loss." And this is the reason why a child of God, commonly, after all his prayers, tears, and confessions, doubts much of God's love toward him; whereas another man, that falls short of him, never questions his estate; the first sees much rottenness and vileness in his best duties, and so judges meanly of himself; the other, ignorant of the vileness of them, prizes them, and esteems himself highly because of them; and setting his corn at so high a price, he may keep them to himself; the Lord never accepts them, nor buys them at so high a rate.

Thirdly. Those that never came to be sensible of their poverty and utter emptiness of all good; for so long as a man has a penny in his purse, that is, feels any good in himself, he will never come a-begging unto Jesus Christ, and therefore rests in himself. Now, did you never feel yourself in this manner poor? That is to say, I am as ignorant as any beast, as vile as any devil. O Lord, what a nest and pile of sin and rebellion lurk in my heart! I once thought at least my heart and desires were good, but now I feel no spiritual life. O dead heart! I am the poorest, vilest, lowest, and blindest creature that ever lived. If you do not thus feel yourself poor, you never came out of your duties; for when the Lord brings any man to Christ, he brings him empty, that so he may make him in debt to Christ for every farthing token.

Fourthly. Those that gain no evangelical righteousness by duties, that is to say--resting in duties. I say, evangelical righteousness, that is more prizing of acquaintance with, desire after, loving and delighting in union with the Lord Jesus Christ; for a mortal man may grow in legal righteousness, (as the stony and thorny ground seed sprang up, and increased much, and came near unto maturity,) and yet rest in duties all this while. For as it is with tradesmen, they rest in their buying and selling, though they make no gain of their trading. Now Jesus Christ is a Christian's gain, (Phil. 1:21;) and hence a child of God asks himself after sermon, after prayer, after sacrament, What have I gained of Christ? Have I got more knowledge of Christ, more admiring of the Lord Jesus? Now, a carnal heart, that rests in his duties, asks only what he has done, as the Pharisee: "I thank God I am not as other men; I fast twice a week, I give alms," and the like; and thinks indeed that he shall be saved, because he prays, and because he hears, and because he reforms, and because he sorrows for his sins; that is, not because of the gaining of Christ in a duty, but because of his naked performance of the duty. And so they are like that man that I have heard of, that thought truly he should be rich, because he had got a wallet to beg: so men, because they perform duties, think verily they shall be saved. No such matter: let a man have a bucket made of gold; does he think to get water because he has a bucket? No, no; he must let it down into the well, and draw up water with it: so must you let down all your duties into Christ, and draw light and life from his fullness, otherwise, though your duties be golden duties, you shall perish without Christ. When a man has bread in his wallet, and got water in his bucket, he may boldly say, So long as these last, I shall not starve; so you may say, when you has found and got Christ, in the performance of any duty, So long as Christ's life lasts, I shall live; as long as he has any wisdom or power, so long shall I be directed and enabled in well doing.

Fifthly. If your duties make you sin more boldly, you do then rest in duties; for these duties, which carry a man out of himself unto Christ, ever fetch power against sin; but duties that a man rests in arm him and fence him in his sin. (Is. 1:14.) A cart that has no wheels to rest on can hardly be drawn into the dirt; but one that has wheels comes loaded through it: so a child of God that has no wheels, no duties, to rest upon, can not willingly be drawn into sin; but another man, though he be loaded with sin, (even sometimes against his conscience,) yet having duties to bear him up, goes merrily on in a sinful course, and makes no bones of sin. When we see a beggarly man insult a great prince, and strike him, we say, Surely, he dares not do it unless he had somebody to bear him out in it, that he rests and trusts unto: so when we see men sin against the great God, we conceive, certainly, they dare not do it, if they had not some duties to bear them out in it, and to encourage them in their way, that they trust unto.

For, take a profane man: what makes him drink, swear, cheat, game, whore? Is there no God to punish? Is there no hell hot enough to torment? Are there no plagues to confound him? Yes. Why does he sin so then? O, he prays to God for forgiveness, and sorrows, and repents in secret, (as he says,) and this bears him up in his lewd tricks.

Take a moral man: he knows he has his failings, and his sins, as the best have, and is overtaken sometimes as the best are: why does he not remove these sins then? He confesses them to God every morning when he awakens. Why is he not more humbled under his sin then? The reason is, he constantly observes morning and evening prayer, and then he craves forgiveness for his failings, by which course he hopes he makes his peace with God; and hence he sins without fear, and rises up out of his falls into sin without sorrow. And thus they see and maintain their sins by their duties, and therefore rest in duties.

Sixthly. Those that see little of their vile hearts by duties, rest in their duties; for if a man be brought nearer to Christ, and to the light, by duties, he will notice more blemishes; for the more a man participates of Christ, his health, and life, the more he feels the vileness and sickness of sin. As Paul when he rested in duties before his conversion, before the law had humbled him, he was alive; that is, he thought himself a sound man, because his duties covered his sins, like fig leaves. Therefore ask your own heart if it be troubled sometimes for sin, and if after your praying and sorrowing you grow well, and think yourself safe, and feel not yourself more vile. If it be thus, I tell you, your duties be but fig leaves to cover your nakedness, and the Lord will find you out, and unmask you one day; and woe to you if you should perish here.

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