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SERMON IX.

THE SINFULNESS, FOLLY, AND DANGER OF DELAY.

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"Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee."—Acts xxiv. 25.

"To-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant," was a saying of the drunkards of Israel, in the days of Isaiah. But the expectation, expressed in this language, has not been confined to the times of the prophet, nor was it peculiar to the sinners of the holy land. Such has always been the fond calculation of every sinful, foolish, and self-deluding man. Each morning that he awakes, he sees the same sun, which he yesterday beheld rising to gild the heavens; he sees the same world around him; the same sky above him; and, as day passes after day, the continued recurrence of the same scenes deludes his practical judgment, making him feel as though these familiar objects were to remain for ever—as though his lot were fixed and changeless upon the earth. It is in vain, that reason remonstrates and protests against this delusion; in vain she whispers to him, that myriads, before him, have passed through these same scenes, and are now gone from them for ever—that soon a morrow will come, which

his eye shall not behold—that soon the worm of the earth must prey upon his body, while his soul must depart to a region far distant, and far different from this. In vain, too, the warning voice of the Most High speaks to him through his inspired word, admonishing him to “work while it is called to-day,” and assuring him, that soon “the night cometh, when no man can work.” He still lives on, the victim of voluntary delusion, and is often found expecting long years of earthly enjoyment, even when treading on the verge of eternity. Nor does he expect the morrow to be merely “*as this day*,” it is to be much “more abundant.” The future is expected to be far better than the past. In the dimness of futurity he discovers nothing but the objects of his hopes; he sees not the hindrances to their attainment; he sees not the new difficulties, perplexities, and disappointments that await him. He surrenders himself to the pleasing dream, that, at some coming period, all his projects will be accomplished, and all his desires gratified.

Such is the delusion, under whose influences all of us are naturally disposed to put off, to some future day, the work of securing our eternal salvation. This was the feeling under which Felix acted, when he said to the Apostle, “Go thy way, for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.” He had listened to the ambassador of God as he “reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come,” until he was made to tremble, in view of his own condition. His judgment was convinced, his conscience aroused, and his soul alarmed. He felt that the concerns of eternity were too important and awful to be despised, or neglected; and he *resolved that he would give them his attention*. But his occupations were then numerous, and his temptations to go astray were strong; all things combined to make that season appear

to him peculiarly unsuitable for the commencement of a religious life. He hoped that some future season would be more convenient; and that *more convenient season* he determined he would embrace. Thus he quieted the remonstrances of his conscience, by a *promise of future amendment*; but this promise he *never fulfilled*. He often again sent for Paul; but never to hear him "reason about righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come." His impressions speedily wore away; for we find him endeavoring to extort money, for his release, from a prisoner whom he knew to be innocent—one whom his own conscience had compelled him to recognize as one clothed with the authority of heaven. And when he departed from the land, he left this prisoner still in bonds, merely to gratify the vindictive feelings of the Jews.

Such was the course of Felix. Instead of finding a more convenient season, each successive season became less convenient; instead of becoming better, he became worse; instead of repentance becoming easier to him, it continually became harder. He learned, by his own experience, (what thousands, since him, have learned by theirs,) that, *to ensure our destruction, nothing more is needed than to defer our repentance.*

Felix, too, my friends, had, in all probability, more and stronger reasons for his procrastination, than any of *you* can alledge, to justify a similar course, which *you* may be pursuing. He had a *greater pressure of business*; for he was the governor of a large province, and accountable for its administration to a most strict and cruel master. He had *stronger temptations to pleasure*, for his great wealth and power furnished him with ampler means of gratifying his appetites and passions. If, then, the disastrous consequences of disobedience to the commands of Jehovah were not averted, or mitigated, in the case of Felix, by

any of those circumstances which *he* might have pleaded in extenuation of *his* guilt; how can we imagine that *similar*, but *weaker* excuses, will avail any one of *us*, when guilty of the same offence?

The service of God is every man's highest employment, his paramount duty, his only source of permanent profit and honor, his sole preservative from everlasting destruction. This work ought, then, to be commenced at the very earliest opportunity. The moment we first learn, that God permits and commands us to serve Him, we ought to accept this service with alacrity, and enter upon it with energy. Fully assured that the least delay in its commencement *may* be ruinous, and *must* be criminal, we wish to press, seriously and earnestly upon your attention, some considerations which exhibit the sinfulness, folly, and danger of all such delay.

First. *It is a folly and a sin, for any one to resolve to do, at some future time, that which is his duty now as much as it can be then.* The service of your Creator you feel to be a *duty*; and you *acknowledge* that you feel it to be such, by *determining that hereafter you will undertake its discharge.* But all the reasons which prove it to be a *duty*, prove that it is a *duty now*, and that there is as much obligation to perform it *now*, as there will be to perform it *ten, twenty, or thirty years hence.* "Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation," is the language in which God addresses us. And again, "To-day, if ye will hear my voice, harden not your hearts." "He *now* commandeth all men everywhere to repent." It is asserted, or implied, in every argument, and every appeal which God addresses to men, that the moment they hear his voice, they are bound to obey it. Our reason and conscience, too, bear witness to the same truth. On what principle, then, can we justify our conduct

in withholding from God what is now his due? For a rational creature, guarded by his care, sustained by his hand, and enriched by his bounties, to withhold from Him his affection and services, is robbery of God. And how can such a course be palliated, or defended? Does it not proceed on the idea that our Maker exacts too much of us, and that we hope to evade the rigor of his demands? Is there not a wish, and an attempt to compound the matter with God, and put him off with less than his due? The debtor, who, when able to pay his creditors, should insist on their compounding, and receiving but a small portion of their just dues, would be considered as shamefully dishonest, and guilty. Is not the dishonesty *greater*, and the guilt *more flagrant*, when we wish to defraud our Maker of his lordship over us—when we wish him to be satisfied with but a portion of those services of our bodies and our souls, all of which he has a right to demand, and all of which he does demand?

Look at it further, and you will see that this conduct is as deeply marked with *ingratitude* as it is with *dishonesty*. God appeals to us as our Friend and our Father—as the Author and Sustainer of our lives—as the Giver of all our mercies, and asks us for our love and service *now*. But his appeals and remonstrances are alike in vain; we acknowledge the *obligations*, but refuse to make any *returns*.

When, therefore, a man determines to postpone the service of God to some future period, let him remember that it is a refusal, before the Searcher of hearts, to be governed, in his conduct towards Him, by those common principles of justice and gratitude which regulate his intercourse, even with his fellow men—a refusal to regard, in his conduct towards Him, those ordinary principles of morality, the disregard of which, in his actions toward his

fellow men, would not only bring down upon him the indignation and scorn of the virtuous, but would immure him within the walls of a prison, or drive him as an outcast from civil society. I leave it to your own consciences to estimate what must be the shameful and sinfulness of such a course, in the eye of Him who seeth all things in their true colors, and judgeth of all things aright. I leave it to your own consciences to conceive the *feelings* with which he must regard such a course, and the *punishment* with which he will visit it.

Secondly. *The postponement of God's service is the postponement of your own enjoyment.* If you will permit yourself to reflect calmly and seriously, you cannot fail to perceive, that a life of faith and dependence upon Christ, a life of obedience and devotedness to God, must yield, even in this present world, far more happiness than a life of worldliness and irreligion. A religious life is one that is accordant with the higher principles of our nature, and promotive of its perfection. Our Almighty Creator has, as a wise and kind father, framed all his laws with a view to the welfare of his children. He has not debarred us from a single pleasure, which could be enjoyed without injury; nor has he imposed upon us a single hardship, which is not, in some way or other, the means of increasing our felicity. That holiness from which men often shrink, as something irksome, unnatural, and unendurable, consists only in an entire abstinence from what is degrading and noxious, and the steady pursuit of what is ennobling and delightful. That God, from whose presence men would often hide themselves, and the very thoughts of whom fill them with apprehension, is the Being who is the light and the joy of the universe; is the One, of whom we are assured, "his love is life, and his loving kindness is far better than life." Look at the pleasures which religion offers to you even

here, and mark how every moment you remain away from her paths, you are depriving yourselves of the best enjoyments of which your nature is capable. Reflect upon the pleasure that might be received from communion with the Father of our spirits. "I will dwell with you, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: ye shall be my sons and my daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." Need we speak of the high delight which such intercourse with the high and lofty One, must impart to a child of dust? Observe, too, the permanent pleasure that springs from confidence in God, and a sense of security amid all the changing scenes and threatening evils of life. To feel that "the arrow that flieth by day, and the pestilence that walketh in darkness," are alike controlled by one who delights in protecting us, and will permit no real ill to befall us; to feel "persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord;" to feel, that, under all circumstances, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea." To feel thus, must certainly insure a *degree* and *kind* of enjoyment for the absence of which, no amount of worldly good can ever furnish an equivalent. The pleasures of an approving conscience, too, are found in the paths of obedience. Our sins do not rise before us, like ghastly apparitions, to terrify us, and threaten us with the vengeance of an offended God. We can look back, with tranquil satisfaction, on days spent in the service of God, and the nights in which our meditation on Him was sweet. We can realize the "blessedness of that man whose sin is

pardoned, and whose iniquity is covered." The hope of "an inheritance, that is incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away," is a source of additional blessedness to those who are walking in the paths of obedience. Most glorious things are spoken of the city of our God. To this, as their final dwelling place, the thoughts of such as trust that they are redeemed by the blood of Christ, are often naturally and necessarily turned. No clouds of adversity can ever shut out from their souls the light of an anticipated heaven; its brightness can illuminate the darkest dungeon, and its glories are most clearly seen, when the eye is dimmed by tears.

Even from this transient glance at the blessings which religion furnishes to us here, do we not discern sufficient evidence to satisfy us of the literal truth of the inspired declaration, that "her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace?" Is it, then, wise to defer, to a future season, the enjoyment of all these blessings? Is it wise to postpone the commencement of a course of life, which God recommends as a course of happiness, and which the concurrent testimony of the good and wise of all ages, declares to be pleasant in its progress, and glorious in its termination? You are now living on, from day to day, sensible of your inability to guard against the ten thousand accidents, any one of which may be fatal to you, yet without any higher being to confide in as your protector and friend—conscious of the guilt of many sins, yet with no security against the dread retribution which an awakened conscience may exact—assured that you are to exist for ever, yet with no hope beyond the grave—aware that you are a pensioner on God's bounty, yet a rebel against his government, and that, while living in his world, you are living under his frown. Is it not folly and madness to continue, even for a day, in such a condition?

Thirdly. Another clear proof of the weakness and evil of delay, is found in the fact, that, *as long as you decline to break off your sins by immediate repentance, and commence the service of God, you are busy in laying up materials for your own wretchedness—you are providing a store of pains and penalties, that must be endured in the subsequent part of this present life.* Many of the evil consequences of our sins remain even after their pardon has been obtained. God may, and does, pardon, upon repentance, and remit the punishment annexed, by his *moral* law, to our sins. Sins repented of, will *not meet us in the future judgment*; but the punishment that follows them from his natural laws—those painful consequences of our sins, that, from our *constitutions* and *circumstances*, we are made to suffer—*these he usually permits to remain.* Thus, a broken constitution is not repaired by a tardy repentance. God will not give back your property squandered in sin, your opportunities of usefulness and improvement neglected, and now passed away. Your evil habits and depraved tastes, formed by indulgences which his law forbids, will not be eradicated by a sudden resolution. Your depraved appetites and passions—those internal foes which you are nourishing to your own destruction, will cost you many a sigh, many a groan, and many a tear, in the struggle to overcome them; and their complete conquest, if ever effected, will, perhaps, only be effected by the dissolution of the body. How many dark hours are often spent, by one who has trifled and sinned away the better years of life, in looking back upon the past. How often does he see deeds done, which he feels that he could freely give a world, if he could only undo. He sees, perhaps, around him the ruin which he has wrought, but which he strives in vain to repair. He sees, fast drifting toward the cataract of destruction, those

whom his example had drawn, or his hand impelled into the stream. Escaped himself from the danger, his warnings and entreaties are addressed to them in vain—regardless of his cries, they hurry on to their doom—and he feels, that though he was once mighty to do evil, he is now powerless to do good. As he looks back upon the sins of by-gone years, he feels the bitter emphasis of the question, addressed by the Apostle to others in a similar condition, “What fruit had ye in those things of which ye are now ashamed?” He finds, by his own sad experience, the truth of the divine declaration, that “their iniquities, though pardoned, are *visited with the rod*, and their transgressions with *stripes*.” Thus we see Job and David, in advanced life, earnestly praying for the removal of the consequences of the sins of their youth. Thus we see Eli, in his old age, suffering the severest affliction, brought upon him by his sins of former years, in the training of his children. He was pardoned by God, but his criminal neglect caused his family to be dispossessed for ever, of their honorable station as chief priests of the tabernacle of Jehovah; while the misdeeds of his sons, Phinehas and Hophni—misdeeds, the result of his own weak and sinful indulgence—bowed the old man’s head with sorrow, and abruptly and violently precipitated him into the grave.

Why, then, should any one delay drawing nigh unto God, while, each moment of his delay, he is sowing the path of life with briars and thorns, which will pierce his soul in the days that are to come? Even a wordly poet, who marked the events of life with an eye unequalled for the comprehensiveness and accuracy of its observations, has told us, that

“God makes scourges of men’s pleasant sins
To whip them with.”

You are now plating those scorpion lashes by which your hearts must hereafter be lacerated. Will you delay the glorious and happy service of the Almighty, to continue in this work ?

Fourthly. There is another loss of immense magnitude incurred by your postponement of the service to which you are urged. *You are losing the opportunity of treasuring up for yourself eternal rewards and enjoyments.* We are brought into the kingdom which God has prepared for his people, solely by the merits of Jesus Christ, received through faith. But our comparative standing in that kingdom depends on our improvement of God's grace, and the opportunity he gives us of honoring him, and purifying our own souls. As "one star differeth from another star in glory," so there are different degrees of glory among the ransomed inhabitants of heaven. The servant, who had gained for his master *ten* pounds, received authority over *ten cities*; while he who had gained *five* pounds, was set over *five cities*. Thus our Saviour himself has taught us, that he who has done little for Him, will receive comparatively little in the kingdom above; while nearness to the throne of the Most High, and large honors, will be awarded to him who, while on earth, has acquired much of his Master's likeness, and labored much for His glory. And think not that it is a matter of small consequence, provided we can only enter heaven, what may be our particular condition there. It will be, indeed, an unmerited mercy, for any of us to enjoy even the lowest condition in the abodes of bliss. But surely it is a noble and holy object of desire and effort, to attain the highest glory and blessedness which our Heavenly Father offers to us in his own courts above. This is no object of unholy ambition, and the pursuit of it can never lead us astray. Pause, then, before determining that you will

postpone, for the present, the work to which God invites you; and reflect that, by dallying for a time in the sinful pleasures of earth, even if you should ever gain admission to the realms of the blest, you may lose a station so superior to the one which will be attained, that the loss of its higher enjoyments, for even a single day, would be worth more than all the worldly pleasures combined, which have ever thrilled through the soul of man from creation's dawn down to the present hour. For it is certain, that the longer you delay the work of purifying your souls, and glorifying your Redeemer, the less of this work can be accomplished, and the less of your offered reward can be secured. Then, by all the heights of glory which may be reached, by all the nearness to God's throne which may be attained, by all the unspeakable joys that may be won, we would urge you to an immediate commencement of the service of Jehovah.

Fifthly. The danger and evil of your delay, is further exhibited by *the fact, that many, while thus acting, are led to adopt errors which for ever shut them out from salvation.* Why is it, that any man adopts the resolution, so seldom executed, that he will, by a future repentance, secure his salvation? It is because conscience, and a dread of punishment, haunt him with dismal forebodings, which he tries to dispel by promising to himself, that, at some future time, he will propitiate God, and escape his threatened wrath. But if any better means of satisfying his conscience, and conjuring down his fears presents itself, he will eagerly avail himself of it. The state of mind, then, which leads a man to determine upon a future repentance, predisposes him to the belief of some one or other of the various plausible and destructive opinions, which, if adopted, will stupify the conscience, hush the whisperings of fear, and lull the soul into false security.

Such errors present to a man, in this condition, a far more *effectual* remedy for the ills with which his soul is troubled, than the one he is using; for they not only offer him an exemption from the *present* trouble and annoyance of an *immediate* reformation, but they entirely deliver him even from the *distant* apprehension of a *future* irksome task.

Each one of you, who is now living in expectation of a future repentance, feels as if he can be in no danger of such an issue of his determinations: but so thought all the multitudes who, while waiting, like you, have been beguiled by deceitful errors into irretrievable woe. The Scriptures most clearly teach us, that God gives men up, while in this state, to believe a lie; so that their destruction is made certain, as a *just punishment of their unjustifiable and criminal hesitation* in hearkening to his calls. They perish, "because they receive not the love of the truth, that they might be saved." "For this cause," we are told, "God shall send upon them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

Sixthly. It is folly to defer the service of God, when we know, *that the requisitions of his law are never relaxed*. His laws are unchangeable; for they are founded on our nature and our obligations; and these continue to be the same in old age as in youth. In our youth, God calls upon us for faith and love, repentance and obedience; and in our old age, he calls upon us for the same. But there is one important difference. To the young, who obey his call, God promises many advantages, which are not promised to those who are late in hearkening to his voice. When religion calls upon you in old age, her *demands* are the *same*, but her *offers* are *less*. In this respect, she reminds us of the Sybil of ancient story, who, though she destroyed a third part of her books of sacred lore, at each successive

refusal of the Roman king to purchase, persisted in demanding, for the diminished number, the same price at which the whole might have once been purchased. Defer till old age a closure with the offers of God, and you will find that he requires of you the same determined struggle against a corrupt nature, the same resolute denial of self, the same entire devotedness to him, which were required of you when first he invited you to enjoy his blessings. You must "take up the cross, and deny yourself." You must "crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts." You must "die daily unto sin, and live unto Christ."

We have said, that the requisitions of God's law are ever the same. They are so, in one sense—for God changes them not. But, if we postpone compliance with them, their requisitions will increase fearfully in magnitude and difficulty. In *themselves*, they remain as they were; but the change in *our characters* and *circumstances* will alter them greatly to us. When a spendthrift has wasted his resources in revel and debauchery, his debt may be the same which formerly pressed upon him, when his estate was unimpaired; but it now presents to him a very different appearance, and requires of him a very different degree of exertion to meet its demands. Thus, the neglected requirements of the Almighty, as our powers become impaired by continuance in sin, assume to us a very different appearance, and demand of us a very different degree of exertion, to enable us to fulfil them. This, however, naturally leads us to another very important consideration.

Seventhly. *The service of God is rendered more difficult and hopeless, by every day's continuance in sin, from the fact, that our sinful habits gain fixedness and strength by time.* Between the natural and the moral world there is here a most striking analogy. An oak, while it is a twig,

or a sapling, may be bent by a single hand, and trained to grow in any direction. But afterwards, when length of years has taken from it its pliability, and imparted to it firmness, the strength of an hundred men cannot straighten it. It will continue to grow on, as it has grown, spreading wide its branches in the air, and striking deep its roots in the ground, until the lightning shall blast it, or the tempest shall tear it from the earth. A spark of fire, too, which might be extinguished by a single drop of water, if permitted to kindle, may soon spread a conflagration which will wrap a whole city in flames. Look, now, at any sinful habit, and see if it does not thus accumulate strength by continuance, until it increases beyond all our power of control. In the case of the drunkard, the covetous, the ambitious, or the debauchee, we can mark the progress and the power of these habits most distinctly; and in the soul of every unconverted man, there is a similar process. He lives in the indulgence of many sinful habits of thought, of feeling, and of action. *Each one of these must be broken*, if he ever turns to God; yet the strength of each one of these he is now foolishly permitting to increase. You cannot, perhaps, see the growth of these habits in your own case; but mark them in the cases of others, and remember that your nature is the same with theirs. You see these evil habits gradually, but rapidly, acquiring strength, until they gain a complete mastery over the soul. It is in vain, then, that their victim groans under the oppressive tyranny which they exercise over him—in vain he struggles to throw off their intolerable yoke. Sometimes the slave of an evil habit is deprived of the power of gratifying his habitually-indulged appetite or passion; but this change does not deliver him from his servitude; it only increases the deplorableness of his condition. This appetite, or the passion, remains in

all the terrible strength which habit has given to it; and, deprived of its means of gratification, it gnaws the soul like a viper of the pit. The wretched condition of such a victim of folly and sin, furnishes us with some similitude and type of the agonies of the damned, when their evil propensities will be developed in fearful energy, and all power of gratification be for ever taken away.

Now, will any of you delay turning unto God, until sinful habits shall become incorporated with your very existence—until every fibre of your soul shall be converted into a cord, to bind you down in slavery to sin? Every moment you hesitate the evil becomes worse. You are like a man who shrinks from the pain of amputating a diseased limb. He cannot muster the resolution to endure a momentary pang, until the disease extends beyond the reach of the knife—until the limb mortifies, and his life is the forfeit of his cowardice and irresolution. Thus may your soul be the victim of hesitation and delay, until you are consigned to eternal death, by the fast-spreading disease of sin. Now is the time—if you intend ever to turn unto God—*now* is the time to execute your intention. Your evil habits now cling around you, and hold you back; but now they are like *striplings* in the power with which they embrace you. Will you, then, wait until their strength and size be ripened by years, and until each one of them shall lay upon you the grasp of a *giant*? Will you postpone this work, because it is *now difficult*, when you cannot fail to see, that it will become *immeasurably more difficult hereafter*? Surely the folly of such delay can be surpassed by nothing but its criminality.

Eighthly. The danger of deferring the service of God is further evinced by the fact, that, *the impressions produced upon you, by his truths, have a natural tendency to become weaker*. They become weaker, in accordance

with the general laws of our nature. Thus we find, that impunity, in any course, produces in us insensibility to its danger. The young soldier, when, for the first time, he enters the field of battle, is almost always agitated and alarmed; when he first hears the shock, the shout, the groans of war, his heart sinks within him. But each successive conflict, from which he escapes, unharmed, hardens his heart against fear; and when he has become a veteran—when he has been long accustomed to such sights and sounds, the roar of artillery, the flash of sabres, and the clash of bayonets, cease to produce their former impressions upon his mind. Even so it is with the soul, in view of those truths which God presents before us in his word, to alarm us, and urge us to repentance. Their tendency to impress us and awe us from ways of sin, is diminished by each successive presentation, when that presentation fails to produce in us any amendment. Even in diseases of the body, we usually find, that the more frequently a remedy is applied to a disorder, without effecting a decided and favourable change, the less prospect there is of its ultimate success. The remedy seems to become weaker on each successive application. The system appears to gain, from every failure, a greater capacity of resisting its effects. Thus we find it to be with the soul, in its resistance to these truths, which are furnished to us, by God, as the remedies for the disease of sin. When they are often presented without producing a change of life, they become familiar, and cease to excite any emotion. Are they denunciations of the wrath of God against sin, or descriptions of the woes to be endured in the dungeons of despair? They are heard, as we hear the howlings of a stormy blast, from which we apprehend no personal danger. Are they proclamations of mercy—invitations from our heavenly Father, to us wandering

and needy prodigals, to return and enjoy the rich blessings he is ever ready to bestow; or are they descriptions of the love, the sufferings, and the glory of our divine, yet condescending Redeemer? They are listened to, as we "listen to the song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and playeth well upon an instrument;" or perhaps the tale has been so often heard, that all its novelty and interest are gone, and it falls upon dull and listless ears.

Those very convictions of sin, which, for a time, soften the heart, and give us a dawn of hope for him who is their subject, unless they soon issue in conversion, become the means of hardening the heart, and consigning it to a gloomier, and more hopeless condition. The truths of God often fall upon the heart, like the droppings of water on the cold rock of the cavern. Instead of wearing it away, as we might expect, they petrify, as they fall upon it; thus increasing its hardness and its bulk, and covering it with an icy and impenetrable shield. So, too, the soul is encrusted by the droppings of truth, until it can be penetrated by nothing, save the fires of the pit.

In view, then, of these principles of our nature, and these facts, which all have observed, is it not, beyond measure, unwise and hazardous, to postpone, to a future period, all determination and effort to discharge the imperative duties which God has enjoined upon you? The discharge of these duties is necessary to your escape from hell, and admission into heaven; and the impressions received from God's word, are needed, to give you the ability to discharge these duties. Will you, then, postpone your determination to discharge them, till the impressibility of your nature shall have worn away, and the truths of God shall have lost all power over your soul? Cases may, and do, indeed, occur, in which,

sensibility to the truth does not thus wear away; but those cases are exceptions—they are cases in which the providence and grace of God resist and counteract the natural course and tendency of human events and human feelings; and such special interpositions of divine favor no man has a right to expect.

Ninthly, Another solemn consideration, which should urge you to an immediate compliance with the invitations and commands of the Almighty, is the *danger to which your refusal subjects you, of his immediately and for ever withdrawing from you.* God does often leave men to their own blindness of mind, and hardness of heart, and then their doom is sealed. "Seek ye the Lord, while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near." Here it is intimated, that there is a time when he *may be sought, yet not found*; when, *though called on, he will be afar off, and will not hear.* The Scriptures teach us most clearly, that there is allotted to each of us a period or time for repentance. It is sometimes called, by the inspired writers, "a day of salvation," to denote, that if we neglect to secure salvation, then, it is gone from us for ever. Sometimes it is spoken of as "a season of visitation," to teach us that God then visits us, and if we do not receive him during that season, he departs from us for ever. Sometimes it is termed "an acceptable time," to warn us that we may then be accepted, and that if we do not then press for acceptance, we shall be rejected for ever. This day, or season, or time, is not always co-extensive with a man's life upon the earth. For we are told of some, that God "delivereth them over to a reprobate mind"—he "gives them up to their own heart's lusts, and to walk in their own counsels"—his "Spirit ceases to strive with them." Then "they grope for the wall like the blind; they stumble at noon-day as in the night." "Because,"

saith the Lord, "I have called, and ye refused; because I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded: but ye set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity, and will mock when your fear cometh. When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish come upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me; for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord." How awful is the condition of the man whom God has thus abandoned. He may be ignorant of it, but a sentence more fearful than that of Cain has been passed upon his soul. He may live in festivity and security for a few days upon the earth; but while sporting and rioting on earth, he is still the doomed inheritor of hell, and none of you can tell how long you may live in rebellion, before this sentence is past upon you. Perhaps your "season of visitation" may, if you repent not, close to-day—this very hour may seal your destiny. Will you, then, continue insensible to the calls of God? Is there a moment's time for delay? Delay not, unless you can ascertain the counsels of Jehovah, and know that your day of acceptance will be prolonged. If you reject God's invitation to-day, to-morrow he may disregard your cry.

Tenthly. The last consideration to which we ask your attention, as showing the folly and danger of procrastination, is your *constant danger of death*. To almost all, death comes "as a thief in the night." Very few, when their last disease attacks them, are aware that it is mortal; and myriads upon myriads are hurried into the eternal world without even a moment's warning. What, then, can give security to you for a single hour beyond the present? Can you arrest the hand of death, and stay it until you

accomplish your purpose of a future amendment? This very hour there are hundreds of human beings, like yourselves, who have passed from earth to stand before the dread tribunal; and perhaps the next hour you may join their throng. Amid all this uncertainty and frailty of life, are you still hesitating about commencing your duty to God, and complying with his imperative demands—demands on obedience to which your soul's happiness depends? You are jeoparding your eternal destinies for the toys of an hour; you are sporting and dallying, as though you had length of days secured to you in your own right hand. If God would cut you down, as he has done thousands, while you are putting far from you the day that you are to choose Him for your master, who can depict the consequences to your soul? What must be the agony of him who, like the rich fool, mentioned in the gospel, is rejoicing in his prospects of earthly enjoyment, when he feels that the hour is come that his "soul shall be required of him."

"How shocking must thy summons be, O Death!
 To him that is at ease in his possessions;
 Who, counting on long years of pleasure here,
 Is quite unpunished for the world to come!
 In that dread moment, how the frantic soul
 Raves round the walls of her clay tenement,
 Runs to each avenue, and shrieks for help,
 But shrieks in vain! How wishfully she looks
 On all she's leaving, now no longer hers!
 A little longer, yet a little longer,
 Oh! might she stay to wash away her stains,
 And fit her for her passage! Mournful sight!
 Her very eyes weep blood; and every groan
 She heaves, is big with horror; but the foe,
 Like a staunch murderer, steady to his purpose;
 Pursues her close through every lane of life,
 Nor misses once the track; but presses on;
 Till forc'd at last to the tremendous verge,
 At once she sinks to everlasting ruin."

But the fatal consequences of your delay will have only begun with this mournful scene. The agonies of that parting soul are as the joys of paradise, compared with the woes that are to commence beyond the grave. That death-bed of horror is a couch of repose, compared with the burning lake, on whose fiery billows the lost soul must toss, and toss for ever. "The smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever," is the language in which the voice of the Eternal pronounces the doom of the lost.

And now, my friends, *calmly* and *rationaly*, but *at once*, settle your determination upon this subject. Will you determine still to put off, to some future day, the choice of God for your master? In serving him, there is a great reward. Will you still decline that service? Ask those who, like yourselves, have delayed, for a season, yet escaped the dangers to which they were exposed, whether they do not regret the folly of their delay—whether they do not still feel its evil consequences; and whether it does not seem like a miracle, that they were saved from destruction? And will you still venture on in this dangerous and thorny road, when the way to heaven is opened wide before you, and you are pressed to enter in? At what future day, or hour, will it be easier to repent and turn to God? When will it ever be so easy? Look back upon your past life, and past feelings. Do you find yourselves growing better? Do you find the work, which you feel that you *must* undertake, becoming less difficult? If it be not, as you know it is not, then remember that, "the thing that hath been is that which shall be." Instead of becoming easier, this work will daily become harder.

Consider, too, the impiety of the *feelings which induce* you to procrastinate; and the impiety of your *determination*.

The feelings are feelings of dislike to God and his service; the determination is a determination to rob him, as far as you can do it safely, of those services which you know to be his due. For the accomplishment of your purpose of a future repentance, you are dependent on God. Can you ask him to *bless you in the formation of this purpose, and aid you to fulfil it?* Can you go and utter to him, in prayer, the language that would truly express your feelings and determination? Can you say, "I do not love thee, O God! I do not love thy character. I do not love thy ways. I do not wish thee to govern me. But if thou wilt permit me to break thy holy laws, and to serve the world and my own perverse inclinations, and wilt spare my life, and continue my powers, I will try, at some future time, to render thee a little service, in the hope that I may escape the punishment that I know must otherwise follow my sins. I pray thee, to keep me in the enjoyment of health and strength, and happiness and life, while I am daily refusing thy mercy, and trampling upon thine authority; and, finally, when I am satisfied with sinning, aid me by thy Spirit to repent, and bring me to heaven."

You would shrink with horror from uttering such a prayer. You would tremble at the thought of offering such an insult to the Almighty. But the *words* are not what God abhors, and the *thoughts* and *feelings* expressed in those words he reads in *your heart*, and in *your actions*. Pause, we entreat you, and reflect, whether this is not the language addressed to your Maker in your daily conduct. And if it is, what must be the guilt and the odiousness of that conduct in his sight? Nothing but the astonishing and unparalleled mercy of God induces him to spare any of us, even for a single day, while we are thus insulting and braving him. But even his patience does not endure for ever;

and your only security is in immediate submission to his will, in an immediate adoption of the resolution that the Lord shall be your God.

"Hasten, sinner, to be wise;
Stay not for the morrow's sun:
Wisdom, if thou still despise,
Harder is she to be won.

Hasten, mercy to implore;
Stay not for the morrow's sun;
Lest thy season should be o'er,
Ere this evening's stage be run."