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THE DANGER OF DELAYING REPENTANCE

by Thomas Boston (1676-1732)

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*“Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding
of the hands to sleep. So shall thy poverty come
as one that traveleth, and thy want as an
armed man.”—Proverbs 6:10-11*

IN this text we have the sluggard’s picture drawn in reference to his eternal concerns, which is the main thing here aimed at. He is one that puts off his great work from time to time, “Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep.”

In the sixth verse, the slothful sinner is sent to school to learn a lesson of the ant, which, though she has not the advantage that he has, yet has so much natural sagacity¹ as to provide for winter in the time of summer and

¹ **sagacity** – wisdom; soundness of judgment.

harvest, when meat is to be got. In the ninth verse, there is a rousing call to the sinner to follow that example. But behold [how] he entertains it: as a person that is loath to arise, he begs a little more sleep, a little more slumber, a little more folding of the hands to sleep!

The point I intend to speak to from these words is: the delaying and putting off of repentance is a soul-ruining course among gospel-hearers.

In discoursing this doctrine, I shall show: first, why it is that gospel-hearers delay and put off repentance; second, that this delaying is a soul-ruining course; third and lastly, make application.

1. Why Gospel-hearers Delay Repentance

I shall show why it is that gospel-hearers delay and put off repentance. There is a generation that are *not* resolved never to repent, never to ply for salvation; but only they are not for it *yet*. They hope to amend and reform afterwards, but for the present they have no heart to it; so by cheating themselves out of their present time, they put a cheat on themselves forever. They are called by the Word and by their own consciences to make ready for another world, to work out their salvation; but their hearts say, “Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep”; and their practice is conformable. Why is it so?

A. *Satan has a great hand in this.* If he cannot hold out the light altogether from disturbing them, he will do what he can to lull them asleep again, before they are fully awakened. “When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace” (Luk 11:21). Thus he did with Felix, who, “as Paul reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season I will call for thee” (Act 24:25). When the soul begins to think on making its escape, all the art of hell will be employed to hold it fast; and it is easier to get one to put off salvation-work² till afterwards, than downright to refuse it altogether. And thus Satan is always on one of the two extremes, urging either that it is too soon, or else that it is too long a-doing.

B. *The cares and business of the world contribute much to this.* Hence our Lord explained “the seed which fell among thorns,” to be those, “which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection” (Luk 8:14). How often are people in such an unsanctified throng of business that they cannot find a convenient season for putting their salvation-work to a point? They have so many other cares upon their heads that they jostle out the care of their souls; they find themselves wrapped up in a cloud of cares, but think with themselves that were they but once through that, they shall ply their main work. Well, but they are no sooner out of that than they are into another—and so on, till the work, being put off from time to time, is quite neglected. The truth is, persons in such a case will hardly find a time for that work, till they be resolute that they shall take it as they can find it.

C. *The predominant love of carnal ease.* “The slothful hideth his hand in his bosom; it grieveth him to bring it again to his mouth” (Pro 26:15). We are all naturally like Issachar, who “saw that rest was good, and the land that it was pleasant; and bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a servant unto tribute” (Gen 49:15). Could people go sleeping to heaven on the sluggard’s bed, would drowsy wishes carry them thither, many would be the passengers in that way. But that will not do. Men must labor, strive, and wrestle; and that is hard in the eyes of carnal men. And therefore, if it cannot be altogether refused, it is put off as long as may be. And hence never will a soul ply salvation-work in earnest till he be effectually roused out of its lazy disposition.

D. *The predominant love of sin.* Why do persons stave off repentance but because they are like those who, entertaining their friends whom they have no will to part with, do therefore put off their departure from day to day? The parting with sin is like the cutting off of a member of the body (Mat 5:30), which one will never yield to unless he be very resolute. No man will delay a minute to throw a burning coal out of his bosom; but they will love to keep a sweet morsel under the tongue, who yet know that they must spit it out at length. And hence it is that no purpose of reformation, which is only for afterwards [i.e., later], can be sincere; because it argues a love to, and loathness to part with, sin.

E. *A natural aversion and backwardness to holiness.* “The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom 8:7). The heart will never be reconciled to the yoke of

² **salvation-work** – the author does not mean that salvation is merited by good works that we do; rather, he is referring to the fact that all men everywhere are commanded to repent and believe in Christ, and are responsible to seek Christ (Mar 1:15; Isa 55:6). This requires our time and attention, which the author refers to as “salvation-work.”

Christ till grace make it so (Psa 110:3). But like as the bullock unaccustomed to the yoke is loath to stoop to it, and therefore still draws aback; so will the heart of man do, till overcoming grace reach it (Jer 31:18). Hence, when light is let into the mind but the aversion still remains in the will, what can be expected, but that the business of repentance, which they dare not absolutely refuse, will be delayed?

F. *The hope of finding the work easier afterwards.* The sluggard thinks with himself that a little more sleep, a little more slumber, a little more folding of the hands to sleep, would make it easier to him to get out of his bed—though, on the contrary, the more and the longer persons delay the work of repentance,³ it is the harder to go through with it. For sin is a disease, which the longer it lasts, gathers the more strength and is the harder to cure. And he that is not fit today to repent will be less fit tomorrow!

G. *A large reckoning on the head of time that is to come;* hence the rich man reckoned, “I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.” But let us hear the judgment of God concerning this speech: “But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?” (Luk 12:19-20). God has given no man a tack⁴ of years, no, nor hours; yet everyone is ready to tell what he will do tomorrow, next month, or next year. The young people think they have a great deal of time before their hand for repentance; the old people think they have enough before them for that too. And in people’s conceit there is always enough, till their time be gone quite, and they be wakened out of their dream. Hopes of long life have ruined many souls. O to be wise! “Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy, and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away” (Jam 4:13-14). But what folly is it to venture eternity on such uncertainty!

H. *A fond conceit of the easiness of the salvation-work.* There is a generation that please themselves with the thought that it is but to believe and repent, and that is soon done. What persons can do with a touch of their hand, they think they need to be in no haste with. But O, how contrary is this to the whole strain of Scripture and the saints’ experience? “Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Mat 7:14). “Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able” (Luk 13:24). The apostle speaks of “the exceeding greatness of his [God’s] power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead” (Eph 1:19-20). “If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?” (1Pe 4:18). Did men believe this, that there is such a difficulty in getting to heaven,⁵ they would not dare delay for a minute entering on the way.

I. *A conceit of sufficient ability in ourselves to turn ourselves from sin unto God.* That the doctrine advancing the power of natural reason and ability in spiritual things does take so much with the world,⁶ is no wonder, since man naturally is such a stranger to his own spiritual impotency. Hence it is observed, that first question with the awakened is, “What must I do to be saved?” (Act 16:30).

It is worth observing how the carnal heart turns itself into different shapes to retain its sinful lusts. Sometimes the man says that he is not able to do any good; but when his sin cannot find shelter under this covert,⁷ but he is pursued hot with conviction, he puts off his reformation to another time—thereby in effect declaring that he can do it if he had but a season for it. He that is to use his oars may row at what hour he pleases; but he that must sail by the help of the wind must set off while it blows, because he cannot command it.

2. Delaying Is a Soul-ruining Course.

I shall show, that this delaying is a soul-ruining course. This is evident, if you consider the following.

³ **work of repentance** – the author does not mean to say that repentance is a work we do in order to earn God’s salvation. Rather, he is simply recognizing that repentance from sin requires searching our hearts, admitting to God, ourselves, and others that we have sinned, confessing the specific sins to each one offended, and turning from the sins to walk in holiness. This requires some time, attention, and effort.

⁴ **tack** – course of action.

⁵ **difficulty...heaven** – again, the author does not mean that there is an extreme burden requiring much work for the sinner to do before he can come to Christ, but only that recognizing our sins and deciding to turn from them may be difficult for us to do emotionally.

⁶ **take...world** – that is, the world accepts and believes this doctrine.

⁷ **covert** – a hiding place; shelter; refuge.

A. *It is directly opposite to the gospel-call*, which is for today, not for tomorrow: “To day if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your hearts” (Heb 3:7-8). All the calls of the gospel require present compliance, and do not allow sinners to put off till another day. It is true, salvation-work must be deliberate work, but you are not allowed a time to deliberate whether you will come to Christ and be holy or no. It is like the call to quench fire in a house that must presently be done, yet done deliberately, so as the work be not marred in the making. How then can it be but a soul-ruining course?

B. *It is threatened with ruin.* The text is very express, “So shall thy poverty come as one that traveleth, and thy want as an armed man.” One with a thousand times more safety might venture on a sword-point, than the edge of such a divine threatening. See Proverbs 23:21 and Ecclesiastes 10:18:

“For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty: and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags” (Pro 23:21).

“By much slothfulness the building decayeth; and through idleness of the hands the house droppeth through” (Ecc 10:18).

And this threatening has been accomplished in many whom their slothful delays have caused to perish, as in the case of Ephraim (Hos 13:13) and Felix (Act 24:25). Many have been not far from the kingdom of God, who yet never came to it.

C. *Whenever grace touches the heart, men see that it is so.* Hence says the psalmist, “I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments” (Psa 119:60). When men are in earnest to get into Christ by faith, and to get back to God by repentance, they dare linger no more in the state of wrath; they flee out of it, as one fleeing for his life (Mat 3:7). Their eyes are opened to see their danger, and therefore they are presently determined.

D. *It has a native tendency to soul-ruin*, which inevitably overtakes them if they do not at length break off all delays and come away. This is evident, if ye consider the following.

First, the state of sin is a state of wrath, where ruin must needs compass a man about on every hand: “He that believeth not the Son, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him” (Joh 3:36). To have stayed in Sodom that day it was to be burnt was dangerous (Gen 19:24), but to abide a moment in the state of wrath is far more dangerous. Who would venture into a house that is about to fall? Who would not presently leave it? And will men venture “yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep” in a state of enmity with God? Surely such persons know not God’s greatness, nor the worth of their own souls.

Secondly, the longer you continue in sin, your spiritual death advances the more upon you. Every sin sets you a step farther from God, is a new bar in the way of your peace with Him, strengthens your natural enmity against Him, and alienates you more from the life of God. And where can this natively end, but in your soul’s ruin? Ah! Are we not far enough on in that way already? Why delay more, that we may go yet farther off from God?

Thirdly, while you remain in this state, there is but a step betwixt you and death, which you may be carried over by a delay of ever so short a time. All that is your security in this case, so far as you can see, is the brittle thread of your life, which may be broken at a touch, and then you are ruined without remedy. So that every delay for repentance, shorter or longer, is a venturing of eternity on that uncertain life of yours, which in a moment may be taken from you.

3. Applications

A. This [doctrine] lets us see the following.

1). That delayers of repentance are self-destroyers, self-murderers. Well may it be said to such, “Why will ye die?” (Eze 18:31). Should a man willfully neglect a remedy for his disease that puts him in hazard of his life, he could not be guiltless of his own death—more [so] than one who, being called to rise and quench the fire in house, and yet would lie still till it were consumed to ashes, would be blameless of its ruin. Self-love, that is, love of sinful self, is the source of the greatest cruelty, whereby lusts are spared to the destruction of the life of the soul!

2). By delays, the interest of hell is advanced—where many are this day who had resolved to repent, but death did not wait their time and so they were disappointed. No wonder new grounds of delay be still laid to persons’ hands, for it is Satan’s great drift to get men entangled in the wilderness that they may not make forward to Ca-

naan's land. And every new entanglement sets the soul a step nearer to destruction. And who questions but Satan has art enough to coin new pretenses for delays?

3). No wonder Satan is most busy to ply the engine⁸ of delays when a sinner is somewhat awakened by conviction, as he did with Felix (Act 24:25). "A soft answer turneth away wrath" (Pro 15:1)—and delays will blunt the edge of convictions as much as a peremptory refusal. Under convictions at a sermon or on a sick-bed, the sinner is awakened out of his sleep; but then nothing can serve Satan's purpose better than "yet a little sleep," which if they get, they sleep off the edge of convictions.

4). They are sinners' best friends that give them least rest in a sinful course. And whatever men think of them now, they will think so afterwards (Pro 5:11-13). Everybody loves ease, and therefore faithful preaching and dealing with souls is a torment to those who love to be undisturbed in their rest in sin (Rev 11:10). But what suits best with our sinful inclinations is worst for our souls, and will in the end be found so. Flattery has ruined many, when plain dealing and fair warning has brought many out of the snare.

B. We may lament here the case of many, nay, of most, that hear the gospel. They put off their work from time to time, and so their spiritual case is going to wreck day by day. This is the case in natural things: "By much slothfulness the building decayeth, and through idleness of the hands the house droppeth through" (Ecc 10:18). They are in a dying condition: the physician comes to their bedside, and offers them a remedy; they do not absolutely refuse it, only they put off the taking of it. In the meantime, their distemper increases and death is advancing apace. The market of free grace is opened, and they are called come and buy (Isa 55:1); they see the need to buy, yet they are not like to stir till the market be over. O madness and folly, to be lamented with tears of blood!

Poor slothful creature that is yet for "a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep," there are four things you know not.

1). You know not the worth of a precious soul, which you are throwing away for what will not profit. Will the sweet sleep in sin quit the cost of the soul's ruin? No, no: "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul" (Mat 16:26)? Christ left the bosom of the Father, and shed His precious blood to redeem the soul. He was wise that paid the price; and if less would have done, He would not have been at needless expense of blood. He was a Father that received it, and would not have put His Son to that if it had not been necessary. Satan goes about without intermission to ruin it. But what low thoughts do you entertain of it, that will not break your rest to save it from ruin?

2). You know not the excellency of precious Christ; sleep locks up your eyes that you cannot see the ravishing sight (Joh 1:10). The eyes of saints and angels are fired on Him, as the glory of the upper house. The eyes opened here by grace are arrested by His overcoming glory. Hence are these rapturous expressions in Scripture: "Whom have I in heaven but thee" (Psa 73:25); "Because of the savor of thy good ointments thy name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love thee" (Song 1:3). Zion's crowned King is making His progress through the city where you dwell; the cry to come out and behold Him reaches your ears (Song 3). But while He goes by, you must have yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep, and so you lose the sight. The royal Bridegroom stretches forth His hand unto you, to espouse you, saying, "Behold Me, behold Me!" You open your drowsy eyes and begin to stretch forth the hand; but sleep overcomes you, your eyes close, and your hand falls down again, and the match is marred. The chariot of the covenant that is driving on to His Father's house halts at your door, and you are called out; the ship is to sail to Immanuel's land, you are called to come aboard—but yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep, and all is lost!

3). You know not the worth of precious time. The apostle will have time redeemed (Eph 5:16), but you squander it away as a thing of no value—and working time is turned by you into sleeping time. Precious moments slip away, and you regard not, though once gone, [that] they can never be recalled. What would those who are past hope give for an hour of that time, whereof you let days, months, and years slip, without any improvement for eternity? O unhappy soul, who knowest not "in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace" (Luk 19:42)!

4). You know not the weight of the wrath of God. It is true none can have a full comprehension of it: "Who knoweth the power of thine anger?" (Psa 90:11). But all the elect of God get such a notion of it as rouses them up to fly from it; "knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (2Co 5:11). And if you had tolerable apprehen-

⁸ engine – device for assisting in one's purpose.

sions of it, it would break off your sleep and slumber, and cause you to put forth your hands to work. Did you [but] consider what “a fearful thing [it is] to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb 10:31), and how when you fall down again into your bed of sloth, you are truly in hazard of it—it would give you such a gliff⁹ as would keep you waking.

There are three things you do not observe.

First, you do not observe what speed your ruin is making while you lie at ease; how your “judgment...lingereth not,” and thy “damnation slumbereth not” (2Pe 2:3). The avenger of blood is pursuing you, though you are not fleeing from the wrath to come. You are like a man sleeping in a leaky ship, which is drawing water every moment, and within a little it will be full and sink to the bottom of the sea if he does not awake and help it. Every hour your debt is growing: the cup of wrath is filling, and fills so much the faster as you are secure.

Secondly, you do not observe how near your destruction may be. You are like the old world, who “were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away” (Mat 24:38-39). Your spiritual lethargy and dead sleep hinders you from hearing the sound of the feet of the approaching stroke. You lie open to the most terrible surprise, to sleep the sleep of death, which you may never awake out of till in hell (Luke 12:19-20; 16:23)! And O, how sad is it for men to be past hope ere they begin to fear, to have the house falling ere they get over their bed!

Thirdly, you do not observe how utterly unable you are to ward off the blow when it comes: “The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who amongst us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?” (Isa 33:14). “Can thine heart endure, or can thine hands be strong in the days that I shall deal with thee? I the LORD have spoken it, and will do it” (Eze 22:14). Can worm-man stand before almighty God, Whose patience may be worn out ere you awake? And if mercy and patience quit the field, justice will succeed into their room—and then there shall be no more sleeping nor ease forever!

C. Why do you go on in this soul-ruining course? Have you no respect to the calls of the gospel, none to your souls, none to eternity? Why do not you do with all your might whatever your hand findeth to do (Ecc 9:10)? I would apply myself here to delaying sinners, to those that are yet out of Christ, and have all to do for eternity still. They are living in a state of wrath, and yet they linger and put off their removal from Sodom. They delay repentance and go on in their sin. I would say to you, “How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep?” I must expostulate with you on this head.

1). You young people, why do you delay repentance? Why are you like the wild asses’ colts, untractable and unteachable (Job 11:12)? No doubt, you think it is too soon for you, that it may be time enough several years after this. You think repentance and seriousness suits best with the wrinkled brows, the pale face, and hollow eyes; that it is pity to spoil the bloom of youth with such work. When do you mind to repent then? It is when you are settled in the world, or when you grow old; at least the days of youth must be over first. But, poor fool,

a). Is the debt of sin so small upon your head that you must run yourself deeper in the debt of God’s justice? Do not you know that you were born a child of wrath (Eph 2:3); that you brought that into the world with you which will damn you, if you come not to Christ? And will not that sink you deep enough in destruction, though you add no more to it, unless you repent?

b). Is not the same holy Law binding on you since you could discern between good and evil, that is binding on the oldest alive? Have the young a liberty to sin, and to cast off the fear of God and religion, more than the old? “For as many as are of the works of the law, are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them” (Gal 3:10). Here there is no exception. The follies of young men may pass; but assure yourselves, God will not pass them. “Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment” (Ecc 11:9). And I doubt not but if you saw your sinful thoughts, words, and actions, whether vain or vile, laid before you, as you must reckon for them at length, how few soever your years have been—you will see them to be more than the hairs on your heads. And I must tell you, that being yet unrenewed, and strangers to the life of grace, *all* your actions have been sin, “An high look, and a proud heart, and the ploughing of the wicked, is sin” (Pro 21:4). And is it not then time to repent?

⁹ **gliff** – unexpected view of something that startles.

c). Who has assured you that ever you shall see the age you speak of? Go to the church-yard and you will see graves of all sizes of your length and under. There are far more young corpses than there are of those that carry gray hairs: ten to one. Most men and women are cut off before they come to old age. What has befallen others as young and flourishing as you, may befall you too. And therefore, since you know not but you may die young, repent while you are young, lest in the end you find yourselves miserably disappointed.

d). Who has best right to your youth and strength: God or the devil? God is courting you for His own gift. "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth" (Ecc 12:1). Satan will labor to keep his possession. God is the first and last; and He required the first and best: the first-fruits, the first-born, the morning-sacrifice. And, He requires the first of your days, and He takes pleasure therein. "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown" (Jer 2:2). And will you devote the first and best to sin and Satan, reserving the last and worst to your Creator?

e). God commands you to repent presently, and therefore it is on the peril of your soul that you venture to delay a moment longer. "To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts" (Heb 4:7). "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment. Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity" (Ecc 11:9-10). A sinful youth will at length make a sad soul. If you delay, you know not how soon God may be provoked against you to cut you off! Monuments of the Lord's anger have been set up in childhood and youth, as well as in old age. Witness the children at Bethel in 2 Kings 2:23-24.

Let not Satan deceive you, as if there were no pleasure in religion. No; wisdom's "ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace" (Pro 3:17). There is a sweetness in religion a thousand times preferable to all the pleasures and vanities youth gads after.

2). You middle-aged people, why do you delay repentance? Why do not you think with yourselves seriously where you are like to take up your eternal lodging, and prepare for eternity by repentance? No doubt you think you have time enough too; but no time at present, for you have another thing ado: the care of a family upon your heads (Luk 14:20). When is your term-day of repentance? It is when you shall have more time than now, or when you grow old. But, O sirs, how do you know that you shall ever see old age? Yea, what do you know, but as Luke 12:20: "This night thy soul shall be required of thee"? Alas! Shall men thus from time to time venture their eternal state upon a mere uncertainty? Your life is but a day, a short day, a winter-day—and you have a long journey to go. Your forenoon is past already, and will you sleep on till the evening that will soon be upon you? The declining sun calls you to awake!

What reason is there that your business in the world should shuffle out your business for eternity? Remember, they had as good excuses as you, who upon the sending of them were rejected, and it was declared their day of grace was past (Luk 14:18-24). O, have you not a soul to provide for, your eternal state to look after? Can you wonder if, as you prefer the world to Christ now, He give you your portion in this life; and if ever the time come that you set yourself to repent, He deny you His grace, and bid you go to the gods you have served?

Consider the advantages you have now for seriousness, when the foam of youth has settled, and the infirmities of old age have not yet drawn on. O, consider and show yourselves men! You have spent your youth in vanity, and will you spend this age too that way? What is it you design for God: the dregs of your years, that age that is the sink of infirmities? And you will part with sin, when you can follow it no longer? O sirs, what confidence can you have, that God will accept *that* off your hand? "And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the LORD of hosts" (Mal 1:8).

Suppose you should live till you grow old—O, how few are there that get grace to repent when they are old! I shall not say there are none such; but though they be, they are very rare. Be not you encouraged to delay because some were called at the eleventh hour (Mat 20:6); for if you mark the text, there were others than those that were standing there at the third, sixth, and ninth hours. We set no bounds to sovereignty; but as for those that live under the gospel, and spend their best days in sin and estrangedness from religion, common observation tells us that it is God's ordinary way to plague them with hardness of heart when they grow old. "His bones are full of the sin of his youth, which shall lie down with him in the dust" (Job 20:11).

Will you see the deceit of delays? When you were young, did you not put it off to this time? And now when that time is come, you are as unready as before. Delay no more then, lest you sleep the sleep of death.

3). Old people, why do you delay repentance; why is not your heart bowing to God's call, when you are begun to bow to meet the grave? You that have always thought you had time enough all your days, you will think there is time enough yet. But when is your term-day of repentance? A death-bed, it is like. And when you come there, you will hope it will be but a sick-bed, and so drive off your work till the utmost point. But, O sirs, may not the time past of your life suffice to have wrought the will of the flesh? Must you have yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep?

When you have neglected God's call to you all your days, what confidence can you have to look for grace or mercy then? Sin, Satan, and the world shall have all your time, and you will look to God, and seek His favor when you can do no more. O, are you not afraid [of] that [which is to] be accomplished on you? "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh...when distress and anguish cometh upon you" (Pro 1:24-27). I trow¹⁰ if your conscience were awakened just now, you should have enough ado to fasten your feet on a promise of mercy.

How do you know that you will get a death-bed or a sick-bed? What do you know but that in a moment you may drop into eternity, as many have done? Death does not always send messengers to warn us of its approach. Nay, see what our Lord says expressly: "If that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; And shall begin to smite his fellow-servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; the lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of; And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Mat 24:48-51).

And is dying such an easy business that you must be laying up other work, yea your main work, for a dying time? I should think that dying itself, with the pains, throes, and sickness that ordinarily attend it, were enough of themselves. Surely, if we were rightly exercised in health, we would endeavor that when we come to die, we should have nothing ado but to die. But I pray you remember, you may come to die raving, without the exercise of your reason. But though you should have it to the last, I pray you consider: is the work of repentance such an easy work as to leave it till the time you can do nothing else? Will you put off—

- turning to God, till you are not able to turn yourselves on a bed, but as you are lifted?
- taking heaven by storm, till your strength be gone?
- crying to God, till you are not able to speak two sentences at once?
- making ready for death, till it be come to your bed-side?

I exhort you all to delay repentance and salvation-work no longer.

Consider: you do but mock God, and cheat yourselves by your delaying, for it is inconsistent with a sincere purpose to return from sin (1Pe 4:1-3). For he that sincerely minds to turn from sin *will presently* turn from it.

Repentance is not in your power; it is God's gift, which He gives when He will. "God hath exalted Christ with his right hand, to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel" (Act 5:31). The time of God's grace is limited; a time wherein He will be found, and when not. "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near" (Isa 55:6). Death certainly puts a period to it; but it seems to be clear that men may out-live their day of grace: "I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper" (Luk 14:24). Time was when Esau might have had the blessing, but then he despised it—but the time came when he could not have it: "Ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears" (Heb 12:17). Strike in then with the occasion; for if wind and tide fail, there can be no setting to sea.

Though we knew certainly that our day of grace were far from the end, yet it is a most unworthy thing so to deal with God. Shall men abuse mercy and grace, because the Lord waits to be gracious? Will men abuse the divine patience, because it suffers long? What a folly is it to stand off as long as we can from Him to Whom we must needs submit ourselves at length!

The time is short, the work great, and so is the opposition. Salvation-work is a great work; it is no easy thing to be a Christian. You must lay your account with all the opposition the devil, the world, and the flesh can make up. You have but an age that is as an hand-breath, as nothing, to do it in.

¹⁰ trow – think; believe; trust.

Your life is most uncertain. We are tenants at will; we have no tack for tomorrow (Jam 4:13-14). We are agreed about the necessity of repentance—the only question is: When shall it be done? God says that today and tomorrow are not yours, but God's. How then can you destinate¹¹ for this use the time that is not yours? "Return to God one day before thy death," say the Jewish doctors. Wisely said; return then today, for it may be you shall die tomorrow!

The longer you delay, the work will be the harder. For sin becomes stronger, as the waters: the farther from the head, the greater they grow. It is observed that Christ groaned at the raising of Lazarus four days dead, but not so at the raising of the young man of Nain, or of Jairus' daughter. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil" (Jer 13:23). Their number increases: the devil, who comes alone at first, at length his name is Legion (Mar 5:9). The heart grows harder, the mind blinder, the will more perverse, the affections more carnal.

A moment's delay may be an eternal loss, because you know not any moment that may not be your last.

God commands you to repent presently (Heb 4:7). Therefore it is upon your peril, if you delay any more.

Objection: The thief on the cross repented at the last gasp (Luk 23:39-43). *Answer:* His repentance was one of the miracles at Christ's death, and he glorified God more at his death than you could if you had been a penitent all your days. But though there was one [thief who was saved, so] that none might despair, yet there was but one, that none might presume. The other thief even died as he lived.



¹¹ destinate – appoint; determine.