

FIFTY REASONS

WHY A SINNER OUGHT TO TURN TO GOD WITHOUT DELAY.

[With some abridgement.]



HEBREWS III. 7, 8.

To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

1. CONSIDER to whom it is that you are commanded to turn; and then tell me whether there can be any reason for delay. It is not to an empty deceitful creature, but to the faithful all-sufficient God; to Him that is the cause of all things; the strength of the creation; the joy of angels; the felicity of the saints; the sun and shield of all the righteous; the refuge of the distressed; and the glory of the whole world. Of such power, that his word can take down the sun from the firmament, and turn the earth and all things into nothing; for he doth more in giving them their being and continuance: of such wisdom, that he was never guilty of mistake; and therefore will not mislead you, nor draw you to any thing that is not for the best: of such goodness, as that evil cannot stand in his sight, and nothing but your evil could make him displeas-
ed with you; and it is from nothing but evil, that he

calleth you to turn. It is not to a malicious enemy, that would do you mischief, but to a gracious God that is love itself; not to an implacable justice, but to a reconciled Father; not to revenging indignation, but to the embrace of those arms, and the mercy of that compassionate Lord, that is enough to melt the hardest heart, when you find yourself, as the poor returning prodigal, in his bosom, when you deserved to have been under his feet. And will the great and blessed God invite thee to his favour, and wilt thou delay and demur upon the return? The greatest of the angels of heaven are glad of his favour, and value no happiness but the light of his countenance. Heaven and earth are supported by him, and nothing can stand without him. How glad would those very devils be of his favour, that tempt thee to neglect his favour! And wilt thou delay to turn to such a God? Why, man, thou art every minute at his mercy. And yet dost thou delay? There are all things imaginable in him to draw thee. There is nothing that is good for thee, but it is perfectly in him, where thou mayst have it certain and perpetual. There is nothing in him to give the least discouragement: let all the devils in hell, and all the enemies of God on earth, say the worst they can against his majesty, and they are not able to find the smallest blemish in his absolute holiness, and wisdom, and goodness. And yet wilt thou delay to return?

2. Consider also, to what it is that thou must turn. Not to uncleanness, but to holiness; not to the sensual life of a beast, but to the noble rational life of a man, and the more noble heavenly life of a Christian; not to an unprofitable worldly toil, but to the most gainful employment that ever the sons of men were acquainted with; not to the deceitful drudgery of sin, but to that godliness which is profitable to all things, "having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."

Sirs, do you know what a life of holiness is? You do not know it, if you turn away from it. I am sure, if you knew it you would never fly from it. No, nor endure to live without it. Why, a life of holiness is nothing but living unto God; to be conversant with him, as the wicked are with the world; and to be devoted to his service, as sensualists are to the flesh. It is to live in the love of God, and of our Redeemer; and in the foretaste of his everlasting glory, and of his love; and in the sweet forethoughts of that blessed life that shall never end; and in the honest self-denying course that leadeth to that blessedness. A godly life is nothing else but a sowing the seed of heaven on earth; and a learning, in the school of Christ, the songs of praise which we must use before the throne of God; and by suffering,—a learning how to triumph and reign with Christ.

Can you delay to come into your Father's family; into the vineyard of the Lord; into the kingdom of God on earth; to be "fellow-citizens of the saints, and of the household of God;" to have the pardon of all your sins, and the sealed promise of everlasting glory? Why, sirs, when you are called on to turn, you are called to the porch of heaven, into the beginning of salvation; and will you delay to accept everlasting life?

3. Consider also, From what you are called to turn; and then judge whether there be any reason of delay. It is from the devil, your enemy; from the love of a deceitful world; from the seductions of corrupted brutish flesh; it is from sin the greatest evil. What is there in sin that you should delay to part with it? Is there any good in it? Or what hath it ever done for you that you should love it? Did it ever do you good? Or did it ever do any man good? It is the deadly enemy of Christ and you, that caused his death, and will cause yours, and is working for your condemnation, if converting and pardoning grace prevent it not. And are you

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loath to leave it? It is the cause of all the miseries of the world, of all the sorrows that ever did befall you, and the cause of the damnation of them that perish; and do you delay to part with it?

4. Your delaying shows that you love not God, and that you prefer your sin before him, and that you would never part with it if you could have your will. For if you loved God, you would long to be restored to his favour, and to be near him, and employed in his service and his family. Love is quick and diligent, and will not draw back. And it is a sign also that you are in love with sin: for else, why should you be so loath to leave it? He that would not leave his sin and turn to God, till the next week, or the next month, or year, would never turn if he might have his desire. For that which makes you desirous to stay a day or a week longer, doth indeed make you loath to turn at all. And therefore it is but hypocrisy to say, that you are willing to turn hereafter, if you are not willing to do it now without delay.

5. Consider, what a case you are in, while you thus delay? Do you think you stand in a safe condition? If you knew where you are, you would sit as upon thorns as long as you are unconverted; you would be as a man that stood up to the knees in the sea, and saw the tide coming towards him, who certainly would think that there is no standing still in such a place. You have all your sin unpardoned; you are under the curse of the law; the wrath of God is upon you, and the fulness of it hangs over your heads; judgment is coming to pass upon you the dreadful doom; the Lord is at hand; death is at the door, and waits but for the word from the mouth of God, that it may arrest you, and bring you to everlasting misery: and is this a state for a man to continue in?

6. Moreover, Your delaying giveth great advantage to the Tempter. If you would presently turn and forsake your sins, and enter into a faithful cove-

nant with God, the devil would be almost out of hope, and the very heart of his temptations would be broken. He would see that now it is too late; there is no getting you out of the arms of Christ. But as long as you delay, you keep him in heart and hope; he hath time to strengthen his prison and fetters, and to renew his snares; and if one temptation serve not, he hath time to try another and another; as if you would stand as a mark for Satan to shoot at, as long as he pleases. What likelihood is there that ever so foolish a sinner should be recovered and saved from his sin?

7. Moreover, Your delaying is a vile abuse of Christ and the Holy Ghost, and may so far provoke him, as to leave you to yourself, and then you are past help. If you delight so to trample on your crucified Lord, and will so long put him to it by refusing his grace and grieving his Spirit, what can you expect but that he should turn away in wrath, and utterly forsake you.

8. Consider also, I beseech you, if you ever mean to turn, what it is that you stay for. Do you think to bring down Christ and heaven to your own terms, and to be saved hereafter with less ado? Sure, you cannot be so foolish: for God will be still the same; and Christ the same; and his promise hath still the same condition, which he will never change; and godliness will be the same, and as much against your carnal interest hereafter as it is now. When you have looked about you ever so long, you will never find a fairer or nearer way; but this same way you must go or perish. If you cannot leave sin now, how shall you leave it then? It will still be as sweet to your flesh as now: or if one grow stale by the decay of nature, another that is worse will spring up in its stead, and though the acts abate, they will all live still at the root; for sin was never mortified by age. So that if ever you will turn, you may best turn now.

9. Yea, more than that, the longer you stay, the harder it will be. If it be hard to-day, it is like to be harder to-morrow. For as the Spirit of Christ is like to forsake you for your wilful delays, so custom will strengthen sin: and custom in sinning will harden your hearts, and make you "past feeling, to work all uncleanness with greediness." Cannot you crush this serpent when it is but weak; and can you encounter it in its serpentine strength? Cannot you pluck up a tender plant; and can you pluck up an oak or cedar? O sinners! what do you mean, to make your recovery so difficult by delay? You are never like to be fairer for heaven, and to find conversion an easier work, than now you may do. Will you stay till the work be ten times harder, and yet do you think it so hard already?

10. Consider also, that sin gets daily victories by your delay. We lay out batteries against it, and preach, and exhort, and pray against it, and it gets a kind of victory over all, as long as we prevail not with you to turn. It conquereth our persuasions and advice; it conquereth all the stirrings of your consciences; it conquereth all your heartless purposes and deceitful promises. And these frequent conquests strengthen your sin, and weaken your resistance, and leave the matter almost hopeless. Before a physician hath used remedies, he hath more hope of a cure, than when he hath tried all means, and finds that the best medicines do no good, but the man is still as bad or worse. So when all means have been tried with you, and yet you are unconverted, the case draws towards desperation itself: the very means are disabled more than before; that is, your hearts are harder to be wrought upon by them. When you have long been under sermons and reading, and among good examples, and yet you are unconverted, these ordinances lose much of their force with you. Custom will make you slight them, and be dead-hearted under them. And it is these very same means and truths, that you have

frustrated, that must do the work, or it will never be done.

11. Moreover, age itself hath many inconveniences, and youth hath many great advantages: and therefore it is folly to delay. In age the understanding and memory grow dull, and people grow incapable, and almost unchangeable. We see, by our every day's experience, that men think they should not change when they are old; that opinion or practice, in which they have been brought up, they think they should not then forsake. To learn when they are old, and to turn when they are old—you see how much they are against it. Besides, how unfit is age to be at that pains that youth can undergo? How unfit to begin the holy warfare against the flesh, the world, and the devil? God's way is to list his soldiers as soon as may be, when in youth; but the devil will persuade them that it is yet too soon; and when he can no longer persuade them that it is yet too soon, he will then persuade them that it is too late. O what a happy thing it is to come to God betimes, and with the first! What advantage hath youth! They have the vigour of wit and of body; they are not rooted and hardened in sin, nor filled with prejudice and obstinacy against godliness, as others are.

12. You have such times of advantage and encouragement as few ages of the world have ever seen, and few nations on earth enjoy at this day. What plain and plentiful teaching have you! What abundance of good examples, and the society of the godly! Private and public helps are common. Seldom has the church seen such days on earth. And yet is not the way to heaven fair enough for you? Yet are you not ready to turn to God? Will you delay till harvest time be over, and the winter of persecution come again? Have you sun, and wind, and tide to serve you, and will you stay to set out in storms and darkness?

13. Moreover, Your delay doth cast your con-

version and salvation into hazard, yea, into many and grievous hazards. And is your everlasting happiness a matter to be wilfully hazarded, by causeless and unreasonable delays? If you delay to-day, you are utterly uncertain of living till to-morrow. If you put by this one motion, you know not whether ever you may have another. You know not whether ever the Spirit of God will put another thought of turning into your hearts; or at least, whether he will incline your hearts to turn.

14. Moreover, the delay of conversion continueth your sin, and so you will daily increase their number, and increase your guilt, and make your souls abundantly miserable. Are you not deep enough in debt to God already, and have you not sins enough to answer for upon your souls? Would you fain have one year's sins more, or one day's sins more, to be charged upon you? O, if you did but know what sin is, it would amaze you to think what a mountain lieth already upon your consciences! One sin unpardoned will sink the sinner into hell; and you have many a thousand upon your souls already, and would you yet have more? Methinks you should rather look about you, and bethink you how you may get a pardon for all that is past.

15. And as sin increaseth daily by delay, so consequently the wrath of God increaseth, and you will run further into his displeasure, and possibly you may cut down the bough that you stand upon, and hasten destruction to yourselves. When you live daily upon God, and are kept out of hell, by a miracle of his mercy, methinks you should not desire yet longer to provoke him, lest he withdraw his mercy, and let you fall into misery.

16. And do but consider, What will become of you if ye be found in these delays? You are then lost, body and soul, for ever. Now if you had but hearts to know what is good for you, the worst of you might be converted and saved; for God doth freely offer you his grace. But if you die in your

delays, in the twinkling of an eye you will find yourselves utterly undone for ever.

17. Consider, That your very time, which you lose by these delays, is an inconceivable loss. When time is gone, what would you then give for one of those years, or days, or hours, which you now foolishly trifle away? O wretched sinners, are there so many thousand souls in hell that would give a world, if they had it, for one of your days; and yet can you afford to throw them away in worldliness, and sensuality, and loitering delays? I tell you, time is better worth than all the wealth and honours of the world. The day is coming when you will value time: when it is gone you will know what a blessing you made light of.

18. Consider also, that God hath given you no time to spare. He hath not lent you one day or hour, more than is needful for the work that you have to do; therefore you have no reason to lose any by your delays. Do you imagine that God would give a man an hour's time for nothing? much less to abuse him and serve his enemy. No, let me tell you, that if you make your best of every hour, if you should never lose a moment of your lives, you would find all little enough for the work you have to do. I know not how others think of time, but for my part I am forced daily to say, How swift, how short is time! And how great is our work! And when we have done our best, how slowly it goeth on! O precious time! What hearts have they, what lives do those men lead, that think time long! That have time to spare, and to pass in idleness!

19. To convince you more, Consider, I beseech you, the exceeding greatness of the work you have to do; and tell me then, whether it be time for you to delay. Especially you, that are yet unconverted, and strangers to the heavenly nature of the saints,—you have far more to do than other men. You have a multitude of head-strong passions to subdue, and

abundance of deadly sins to kill, and rooted vices to root up: you have a false opinion of God, and his ways, to be plucked up; and the customs of many years' standing to be broken: you have blind minds that must be enlightened with heavenly knowledge, and abundance of spiritual truths that are above the reach of flesh and blood, that you must needs learn and understand: you have much to know, that is hard to be known: you have a dead soul to be made alive, and a hard heart to be melted; and a seared conscience to be softened, and made tender; and the guilt of many thousand sins to be pardoned: you have a new heart to get, and a new end to aim at, and seek after, and a new life to live; abundance of enemies you have to fight with, and overcome; abundance of temptations to resist and conquer; many graces to get, and preserve and exercise, and increase; and abundance of holy work to do for the service of God, and the good of yourselves and others. O what a deal of work doth every one of these words contain! And yet what abundance more might I name! And have you all this to do, and yet will you delay? And they are not indifferent matters that are before you: it is no less than the saving of your souls, and obtaining the blessed glory of the saints. Necessity is upon you. These are things that must be done, or else wo to you that ever you were born! And yet have you another day to lose? Why, sirs, if you had a hundred miles to go in a day or two, upon pain of death, would you delay? O think of the work that you have to do, and then judge whether it be not time to stir?

20. And methinks it should exceedingly terrify you to consider, What multitudes perish by such delays; and how few that wilfully delay, are ever converted and saved! Many a soul, that once had purposes hereafter to repent, is now in the misery where there is no repentance that will do them any good. For my part, though I have known some very few converted when they were old; yet I must

needs say, both that they were very few indeed, and I had reason to believe, that they were such as had sinned before in ignorance, and did not wilfully put off repentance, when they were convinced that they must turn. Though I doubt not but God may convert even these if he please, yet I cannot say that I have ever known many, if any such, to be converted. Sure I am that God's usual time is in childhood, or youth, before they have long abused grace, and wilfully delayed to turn when they were convinced. Some considerable time, I confess, may have elapsed before their first convictions and purposes be brought to any great ripeness of performance: but O how dangerous it is to delay!

21. Consider also, Either conversion is good or bad for you; either it is needful or unnecessary. If it be bad, and a needless thing, then let it alone altogether. But if you are convinced that it is good and necessary, is it not better now than to stay any longer? Is it not the sooner the better? Are you afraid of being safe or happy too soon? If you are sick, you care not how soon you are well; if you have a bone out, you care not how soon it is set; if you fall into the water, you care not how soon you get out; if your house be on fire, you care not how soon it be quenched; if you are put in fear by any doubts or ill tidings, you care not how soon your fears be over. And yet are you afraid of being too soon out of the power of the devil, and the danger of hell; and of being too soon the sons of God, and the holy, justified heirs of heaven?

22. Consider also, Either you can turn now, or not. If you can and yet will not, you are utterly without excuse. If you cannot to-day, how much less will you be able hereafter, when strength is less, and difficulties greater, and burdens more? Is it not time, therefore, to apply to Christ for strength; and should not the very sense of your inability dissuade you from delay?

23. Consider how long you have stayed already,

and put God's patience to it by your folly. Have not the devil, the world, and the flesh, had many years time of your life already? Have you not long enough been swallowing the poison of sin; and long enough been abusing the Lord that made you; and the blood of the Son of God that was shed for you; and the Spirit of grace, that hath moved and persuaded you? Are you not yet gone far enough from God? And have you not yet done enough to the destroying of yourselves, and casting away everlasting life? O wretched sinners! it is rather time for you to fall down on your faces before the Lord, and with tears and groans to lament it day and night, that ever you have gone so far in sin, and delayed so long to turn to him as you have done. Sure, if after so many years' rebellion, you are yet so far from lamenting it, that you had rather have more of it, and had rather hold on a little longer no wonder if God forsake you, and let you alone.

24. Have you any hopes of God's acceptance and your salvation, or not? If you have such hopes,—that, when you turn, God will pardon all your sins, and give you everlasting life,—is it, think you, an ingenuous thing to desire to offend him yet a little longer, from whom you expect such exceeding mercy and glory? Have you the faces to speak out what is in your hearts and practice; and to go to God with such words as these? 'Lord, I know I cannot have the pardon of one sin without the blood of Christ, and the riches of thy mercy. Nor can I be saved from hell without it: but yet I hope for all this from thy grace. I beseech thee let me live a little longer in my sins; a little longer let me trample on the blood of Christ, and despise thy commandments, and abuse thy mercies; and then pardon me all that ever I did, and take me into glory.'—Could you for shame put such a request to God as this? If you could, you are past shame: if not, then do not practise and desire that which you cannot, for shame, speak out and request.

25. Moreover, It is an exceeding advantage to you to come to God betimes; and an exceeding loss, that you will suffer by delay, if you were sure to be converted at the last. If you speedily come in, you may have time to learn, and get more understanding in the matters of God, than otherwise can be expected. For knowledge will not be had but by time and study. You may also have time to get strength of grace, when beginners can expect no more than infant strength. You may grow to be men of parts and abilities, to be useful in the church, and profitable to those about you, when others cannot go or stand, unless they lean on the stronger for support. If you come in betimes, you may do God service; which, in the evening of the day, you will neither have strength nor time to do. You may have time to get assurance of salvation, and to be ready with comfort, when death shall call; when a weakling is like to be perplexed with doubts and fears, and death is like to be terrible, because of their unreadiness.

26. And did you ever consider, who and how many stay for you while you delay? Do you know who it is that you make to wait your leisure? God himself stands over you with the offers of his mercy, as if he thought it long till your return, saying, "O that there were such a heart in them!" and "when will it once be!" "How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity, and scorners delight in scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn ye at my reproof." And do you think it wise, or safe, for you to make the God of heaven wait on you, while you are serving his enemy? Can you offer God a baser indignity, than to expect he should support your lives, and feed you, and preserve you, and patiently forbear while you abuse him to his face, and drudge for the flesh, the world, and the devil? Should a worm thus use the Lord that made him, marvel not, if he withdraw his supporting mercy, and let such wretches drop into hell!

And it is not God only, but his servants, and creatures, and ordinances, that are all waiting on you. The angels stay for the joy that is due to them upon your conversion. Ministers are studying, and preaching, and praying for you ; godly neighbours are praying, and longing for your change. The springs and rivers are flowing for you ; the winds blow for you ; the sun shines for you ; the clouds rain for you ; the earth bears fruit for you ; the beasts must labour, and suffer, and die for you : all things are doing, and would you stand still, or else do worse ? What haste makes the sun about the world, to return in its time to give you light ! What haste make other creatures in your service ! And yet must you delay ? Must God stay, and Christ and the Spirit stay ? Must angels stay, must ministers stay, must the godly stay, and the ordinances stay, and all the creatures stay your leisure, while you are abusing God, and your souls, and others, and while you delay, as if it were too soon to turn ?

27. Consider, That when you were lost, the Son of God did not delay the work of redemption. He presently undertook it, and turned by the stroke of condemning justice. In the fulness of time he came and performed what he undertook ; he failed not one day of his appointed time. And will you now delay to accept the benefit and to turn to him ? Must he make such haste to save you at so dear a rate, and now will you delay to be saved ?

28. Moreover, God doth not delay to do you good. You have the day and night in their proper seasons ; the sun doth not fail to rise upon you at the appointed time ; you have the spring and harvest in their proper seasons ; the former and the latter rain in season. When you are in want, you have seasonable supplies ; and when you are in danger, you have seasonable deliverances. And is it meet or equal that you should refuse to bring forth sea-

sonable fruit, but still be putting off God with your delays ?

29. Moreover, When you are in trouble and necessity, you are then in haste for deliverance and relief. Then you think every day a week, till your danger or suffering be past. If you be under the pain of a disease, or in danger of death, or under poverty, or oppression, or disgrace, you would have God relieve you without delay ; and yet you will not turn to him without delay. Then you are ready to cry out, ‘ How long, Lord, how long till deliverance come ? ’ But you will not hear God, when he crieth to you, in your sins—How long will it be ere you turn from your transgressions ? When shall it once be ? When you are to receive any outward deliverance, you care not how soon ; but when you are to turn to God, and receive his grace and title to glory, then you care not how late, as if you had no mind of it. Can you, for shame, beg of God to hasten your deliverance, when you remember your delays, and still continue to trifle with him and draw back ?

30. Your present prosperity, and worldly delights, are passing away without delay ; and should you delay to make sure of better in their stead ? Time is going ; and health is going ; youth is going ; yea, life is going ; your riches are taking wing ; your fleshly pleasures do perish in the very using. Shortly you must part with house and lands, with goods and friends ; and all your mirth and earthly business will be done. All this you know, and yet will you delay to lay up a durable treasure, which you may trust upon, and to provide you a better tenement before you be turned out of this ? What will you do for a habitation, for pleasures and contents, when all that you have now is spent and gone, and earth will afford you nothing but a grave ? If you could but keep that you have, I should not much wonder, that knowing so little of God and another world, you look not much after it ; but when you perceive death

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knocking at your doors, and seeing all your worldly comforts are packing up and hasting away, methinks you should presently turn, and make sure of heaven, without any more delay.

31. Consider also, Whether it be equal that you should delay your conversion, when you can seasonably despatch your worldly business; and when your flesh would be provided for, you can hearken to it without delay. You have wit enough to sow your seed in season, and will not delay it till the time of harvest. You will reap your corn when it is ripe, and gather your fruit when it is ripe, without delay. You observe the seasons in the course of your labours, day by day, and year by year. You will not lie in bed, when you should be at your work, nor delay all night to go to your rest; nor suffer your servants to delay your business. If you be sick, you will seek help without delay, lest your disease should grow to be incurable. And yet will you delay your conversion, and the making sure of heaven? Why, sirs, shall these trifles be done without delay, and shall your salvation be put off? Can you have time for every thing, except that one thing which all the rest are merely to promote, and in comparison of which they are all but dreams? Can you have time to work, to plough, and sow, and reap, and cannot you have time to prepare for eternal life? Why, sirs, if you cannot find time yet to search your hearts, to turn to God, and prepare for death, give over eating and drinking, and sleeping, and say, you cannot have time for these. You may as wisely say so for these smaller matters, as for the greater.

31. Moreover, if men offer you conveniences and commodities for your bodies, you will not stand delaying, and need so many persuasions to accept them. If your landlord would for nothing renew your lease; if any man would give you houses or lands, would you delay so long before you would accept them? A beggar at your door will not only

thankfully take your alms, without your entreaty and importunity, but will beg for it, and be importunate with you to give it. And yet will you delay to accept the blessed offers of grace, which are so much greater?

33. Yet consider, that it is God that is the giver, and you that are the miserable beggars and receivers. And therefore it is fitter you should wait on God, and call on him for his grace, when he seemeth to delay, and not that he should wait on you. He can live without your receiving, but you cannot live without his giving. The beggar must be glad of an alms at any time; and the condemned person of a pardon at any time; but the giver may well expect that his gifts be received without delay, or else he may let them go without.

34. And methinks you should not deal worse with God, when he comes to you as a physician to save your own souls, than you would do with a neighbour, or a friend, when it is not for your own good, but for theirs. If your neighbour lay a dying, you would go and visit him without delay. If he fell down in a swoon, you would catch him up without delay. If he fell into the fire or water, you would pluck him out without delay. Yea, you would do thus much to a very beast. And yet will you delay, when it is not another, but yourselves that are sinking and drowning, and within a step of death and desperation?

35. If yet you perceive not how unreasonably you deal with God and your souls, I beseech you, consider, whether you do not deal worse with him than you do with the devil himself. If Satan or his servants persuade you to sin, you delay not so long but you are presently at it. You are ready to follow every tippling companion or gamester that puts up the finger. You are as willing to go, as they are to invite you. The very sight of the cup does presently prevail with the drunkard; and the sight of a harlot prevaieth with the fornicator; and sin

can be presently entertained without delay. But when God comes, when Christ calleth, when the Spirit moveth, when the minister persuadeth, when conscience is convinced, we can have nothing but wishes, and purposes, and promises, with delays.

Nay, more than this: so eager are they on their sin, that we are not able to entreat them to delay it. When the passionate man is but provoked, we cannot persuade him to delay his railing language, so long as to consider first of the issue. We cannot entreat the drunkard to put off his drunkenness but for one twelve months, while he trieth another course. All the ministers in the country cannot persuade the worldling to forbear his worldliness, and the proud persons their pride, and the ungodly person his ungodliness, for the space of one month, or week, or day. And yet when God hath a command and a request to them, to turn to him and be saved, here they can delay, without our entreaty.

36. Consider also, that it is not possible for you to turn too soon: nor will you ever have cause to repent of your speediness. Delay may undo you; but speedy turning can do you no harm. Should there be any delay, where it is not possible to be too hasty? Do you think that there is ever a saint in heaven, yea, or on earth, that is sorry he continued not longer unconverted? No: you shall never hear of such a repentance from the mouth of any that is indeed converted.

37. But I must tell you on the contrary, that if ever you be so happy as to be converted, you will repent it, and a hundred times repent it, that you delayed so long before you yielded. O, how it will grieve you, when your hearts are melted with the love of God, and are overcome with the infinite kindness of his pardoning, saving grace, that ever you had the hearts to abuse such a God, and deal so unkindly with him, and stand out so long against that compassion that was seeking your salvation! O, how it will grieve your hearts, to consider that

you have spent so much of your lives in sin, for the devil, and the flesh, and the deceitful world! O, you will think with yourselves, 'Was not God more worthy of my youthful days? Had I not better have spent them in his service, and in the work of my salvation? Alas, that I should waste such precious days, and now be so far behind-hand as I am! Now I want that faith, that hope, that love, that peace, that assurance, that joy in the Holy Ghost, which I might have had, if I had spent those years for God, which I spent in the service of the world and the flesh.'

38. And I pray you, consider whether it belongs of right to God or you, to determine of the day and hour of your coming in. It is he that must give you the pardon of your sins; and doth it not belong to him to appoint the time of your receiving it? You cannot have Christ and life without him: it is he that must give you the kingdom of heaven: and is he not worthy, then, to appoint the time of your conversion, that you may be made partakers of it? But if he say, To-day, dare you say, I will stay till to-morrow?

39. Nay, consider, whether God or you be likelier to know the meetest time. Dare you say that you know better when to turn than God doth? I suppose you dare not; and if you dare not say so, for shame, let not your practice say so. God saith, "To-day, while it is called to-day, hear my voice, and harden not your hearts." And dare you say, It is better to stay one month longer, or one day longer? God saith, "Behold, this is the accepted time! Behold, this is the day of salvation!" And will you say, It is time enough to-morrow? Do you know better than God? If your physician do but tell you in a pleurisy or a fever, You must let blood this day—before to-morrow; you have so much reason as to submit to his understanding, and think that he knows better than you

and cannot you allow as much to the God of wisdom ?

40. Consider also, that the speediness of your conversion, when God first calls you, doth make you the more welcome, and is a thing exceedingly pleasing to God. Our proverb is, A speedy gift is a double gift. If you ask any thing of a friend, and he give it you presently and cheerfully at the first asking, you will think you have it with a good-will ; but if he stand long delaying first, and demurring upon it, you will think that you have it with an ill-will, and that you owe him the smaller thanks. If a very beggar at your door must stay long for an alms, he will think he is the less beholden to you. How much more may God be displeased, when he must stay so long for his own, and that for your benefit ! God loveth a cheerful giver, and consequently, a cheerful obeyer of his call ; and if it be hearty and cheerful, it is the likelier to be speedy, without such delays.

41. And I would desire you but to do with God as you would be done by. Would you take it well of your children, if they should tear all their clothes, and cast their meat to the dogs, and tread it in the dirt, and when you entreat them, they will not regard you ? Would you stand month after month entreating and waiting on them, as God doth on you ? If your servant will spend the whole day and year in drinking and playing, when he should do your work, will you wait on him all the year with entreaties, and pay him at last, as if he had served you ? And can you expect that God should deal so with you ?

42. And consider, I entreat you, that your delay is a denial, and so may God interpret it, for the time of your turning is part of the command. He that saith, Turn, saith, Now, even to-day, without delay. He giveth you no longer day. If time be lengthened, and the offer made again and again,

that is more than he promised you, or you could have promised yourselves. His command is, Now return and live. And if you refuse the time, the present time, you refuse the offer, and forfeit the benefit. And if you knew but what it is to give God a denial in such a case as this, and what a case you were in, if he should turn away in wrath and never come near you more; you would then be afraid of jesting with his hot displeasure, or trifling with the Lord.

43. And, methinks, you should remember, that God does not stay thus on all, as he doth on you. Thousands are under despair, and past all remedy, while patience is waiting yet upon you. Can you forget that others are in hell at this very hour, for as small sins as those that you are yet entangled and linger in? Good Lord, what a thing is a senseless heart! That at the same time when millions are in misery, for delaying or refusing to be converted, their successors should fearlessly venture in their steps!

44. And I must tell you, that God will not always thus wait on you, and attend you by his patience, as hitherto he hath done. Patience hath his appointed time. And if you out-stay that time, you are miserable. I can assure you, sirs, the glass is turned upon you, and when it is run out, you shall never have an hour of patience more. Then God will no more entreat you to be converted. He will not always stand over you with salvation, and say, O that this sinner would repent and live! O that he would take the mercies that I have provided for him! Do not expect that God should do this always with you; for it will not be.

45. Your delays weary the servants of Christ that are employed for your recovery. Ministers will grow weary of preaching to you, and persuading you. When we come to men that were never warned before, we come in hopes that they will hear and obey; and this hope puts life and

earnestness into our persuasions: but when we have persuaded men but a few times in vain, and leave them as we found them, our spirits begin to droop and flag; much more, when we have preached and persuaded you many years, and still you are the same, and are but where you were,—this dulls a minister's spirit, and makes him preach heavily and coldly, when he is almost out of heart and hope.

Truly, sirs, I must tell you, for my own part, that if it had not been for those that gave me better encouragement by their obedience, I should never have held out with you a quarter of this time. If all had profited as little as some, and all remained in an unconverted state as some; if the humble, penitent, obedient ones among you, had not been my comfort and encouragement under Christ, I had been gone from you many years ago; I could never have held out till now: either my corruption would have made me run away with Jonah, or my judgment would have commanded me to shake off the dust off my feet as a witness against you, and depart.

But to what end do I speak all this to you? To what end? Why, to let you see how you abuse both God and man, by your delays and disobedience. You cannot possibly do us, that are your teachers, a greater injury or mischief in the world. It is not in your power to wrong us more. Are our studies and our labours worth nothing? Are our watchings and waitings worth nothing? Are our prayers, and tears, and groans to be despised? God will not despise them, if you do; believe it, he will set them all on your account, and you will one day have a heavy reckoning of them, and pay full dear for them. Is it equal dealing with us, that when we are watching for your souls, as men that know we must give an account, you should rob us of our comfort, and make us do it with sighs and sorrow? Yea, that you should undo all that we are doing,

and make us lose our labour and our hopes? And yet do you not think to pay for this? Many years we have been persuading you but to turn and live, and yet you are unturned; you have been convinced long, and thinking on it; and wishing long, and talking of it; and promising long, and yet it is undone, and here is nothing but delays. We see, while you delay, death takes away one this week, and another the next week, and you are passing into the other world apace; and yet those that are left behind will take no warning, but still delay: we see that Satan delays not while you delay: he is day and night at work against you: if he seem to make a truce with you, it is that he may be doing secretly, while you suspect him not: we see that sin delayeth not while you delay; it is working like poison or infection in your bodies, and seizing upon your vital powers; it is every day blinding you more and more, it is hardening your hearts more and more, and searing your consciences, to bring you past all feeling and hope. And must we stand by and see this miserable work with our people's souls, and all be frustrated and rejected by themselves that we do for their deliverance? I pray you deal but fairly with us, and tell us whether ever you will turn or not. If you will not, but are resolved for sin and hell, say so, that we may know the worst; speak out your minds, that we may know what to trust to. But if still you say, you will turn—when will you do it? You will do it, and you hope you shall: but when? How long would you have us wait yet? Nay, I must tell you, that you even weary God himself. It is his own expression, (Mal. ii. 17. Isa. xliii. 24.) "Thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities." (Isa. i. 14.) And I must say to you as the Prophet, (Isa. vii. 13.) "Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but you will weary my God also?" Consider what it is that you do.

46. Consider also, that you are at a constant and unspeakable loss every day and hour that you delay

your conversion. O! little do you know what you deprive yourselves of every day. If a slave in the galleys or prison might live at court, as a favourite of the prince, in honour, and delight, and ease, would he delay either years or hours? Or would he not rather think within himself, Is it not better to be at ease and in honour, than to be here? As the prodigal said, "How many hired servants of my father have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!" All this while I might be in plenty and delight.—All the while that you live in sin, you might be in favour of God, in the high and heavenly employments of the saints; you might have the comforts of daily communion with Christ and with the saints; you might be laying up for another world, and might look death in the face with faith and confidence, as one that cannot be conquered by it; you might live as the heirs of heaven on earth. All this, and more than this, you lose by your delays; all the mercies of God are lost upon you; your food and raiment, your health and wealth, which you set so much by, all is lost, and worse than lost, for they turn to your greater hurt; all our pains with you, and all the ordinances of God which you possess, and all your time is lost, and worse. And do you think it, indeed, a wise man's part to live any longer at such a loss as this, and that wilfully and for nothing? If you knew your loss, you would not think so.

47. Nay more, you are all this while doing that which must be undone again, or you will be undone for ever. You are running from God, but you must come back again, or perish when all is done. You are learning a hundred carnal lessons and false conceits, that must be all unlearned again; you are shutting up your eyes in wilful ignorance, which must be opened again: you must learn the doctrine of Christ, the great Teacher of the Church, if you stay never so long, or else you would be cut off from his people. Acts iii. 22. and vii. 37.

When you have been long accustoming yourselves to sin, you must unlearn and break all these customs again. You are hardening your hearts daily, and they must again be softened. And I must tell you, that though a little time and labour may serve to do mischief, yet it is not quickly undone again. You may sooner set your house on fire than quench it. You may sooner cut and wound your bodies, than heal them again; and sooner catch a cold or a disease than cure it; you may quickly do that which must be longer undoing. Besides, the cure is accompanied with pain; you must take many a bitter draught, in groans or tears of godly sorrow, for these delays; the wounds, that you are now giving your souls, must smart, and smart again, before they are searched and healed to the bottom. And what man of wisdom would make himself such work and sorrow? Who would travel on an hour longer, that knows he is out of his way, and must come back again? Would you not think him a madman that would say, I will go on a little further, and then I will turn back.

48. And methinks if it were but this, it would terrify you from your delays, that it is likely to make your conversion more grievous, if you should have so great mercy from God, after all, to be converted. God must send either some grievous affliction to fire and frighten you out of your sins, or else some terrible horrors of conscience, that should make you groan, and groan again, in the feelings of your folly. The pangs and throes of conscience, in the work of conversion, are far more grievous in some than in others. Some are even on the rack, and almost brought beside their wits, and the next step to desperation, with horror of soul and the sense of the wrath of God; so that they lie in doubts and complaints many a year together, and think that they are even forsaken of God. And to delay your conversion is the way to draw on either this or worse.

49. Consider also, that delays are contrary to the very nature of the work, and the nature of your souls themselves. If indeed you ever mean to turn, it is a work of haste, and violence, and diligence, that you must needs set upon. You must "strive to enter in, for the gate is strait, the way is narrow that leads to life, and few there be that find it." "Many shall seek to enter, and shall not be able." "When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us, he shall answer, I know you not whence you are, depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity." It is a race that you are to run, and heaven is the prize. "And you know that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize; and therefore you must so run, as that you may win and obtain."

And what is more contrary to this than delay? You are soldiers in fight, and your salvation lieth in the victory; and will you trifle in such a case, when death or life is even at hand? You are travellers to another world, and will you stay till the day is almost past, before you will begin your journey? Christianity is a work of that infinite consequence, and requireth such speedy and vigorous despatch, that delay is more unreasonable in this than in any thing in all the world.

50. If all this will not serve to make you turn, let me tell you, that while you are delaying, your judgment doth not delay; and that when it comes, these delays will multiply your misery, and the remembrance of them will be your everlasting torment. Whatever you are thinking of, or whatever you are doing, your dreadful doom is drawing on apace, and misery will overtake you, before you are aware. When you are in the alehouse, little thinking of ruin, even then is your damnation coming in haste; when you are drowned in the pleasures or cares of the world, your judgment is still hastening. You may delay, but it will not delay. It is the saying of

the Holy Ghost, "Whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not." You may slumber, and that so carelessly, that we cannot awake you, but your damnation slumbereth not, nor hath done of a long time, while you thought it slumbered; and when it comes, it will awaken you. As a man that is in a coach on the road, or in a boat on the water, whatever he is speaking, or thinking, or doing, he is still going on, and hastening to his journey's end, or going down the stream; so whatever you think, or speak, or do, whether you believe it, or mock at it, whether you sleep or wake, whether you remember it or forget it, you are hastening to destruction, and you are every day a day nearer to it than before. "Behold the Judge standeth before the door." The Holy Ghost hath told you, "the Lord is at hand." "The day is at hand; the time is at hand; the end of all things is at hand." Rom. xiii. 12. Rev. xxii. 10. 1 Pet. iv. 7. "Behold, saith the Lord, I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give to every man according as his work shall be." And do you, as it were, see the Judge approaching, and yet will you delay?

And withal consider, that when it comes, it will be most sore to such as you; and then what thoughts do you think you shall have of these delays? You are unable to conceive how it will torment your consciences, when you see that all your hopes are gone, to think to what you have brought yourselves by your trifling. To feel yourselves in remediless misery, and remember how long the remedy was offered you, and you delayed to use it till it was too late. To see that you are for ever shut out of heaven, and remember that you might have had it as well as others, but you lost it by delay. O then it will come with horror into your mind, How often was I persuaded, and told of this? How often had I inward motions to return? How often did I purpose to be holy and to give up my heart and life to God? I was

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even ready to have yielded, but I still delayed, and now it is too late.

And now, having laid you down no less than fifty moving considerations, if it be possible to save you from these delays, I conclude with this request to you, whoever you be that read these lines, that you would but consider of all these reasons, and then entertain them as they deserve. There is not one of them that you are able to gainsay, much less all of them. If after the reading of all these, you can yet believe that you have reasons to delay, your understandings are forsaken of God; but if you are forced to confess that you should not delay, what will you do then? Will you obey God and your own consciences, or will you not? Will you turn this hour without delay? Take heed of denying it, lest you have never such a motion more. You know not but God, who calls you to it, may be resolved that it should be now or never. I do beseech you, yea, as his messenger, I charge you in his name, that you delay not an hour longer, but presently be resolved, and make an unchangeable covenant with God; and, as ever you would have favour in that day of your distress, delay not now to accept his favour in the day of your visitation.

O what a blessed family were that, who upon the reading of this, would presently say, We have done exceeding foolishly in delaying so great a matter so long; let us agree together to give up ourselves to God without any more delay. This shall be the day; we will stay no longer. The flesh, and the world, and the devil, have had too much already. It is a wonder of patience that hath borne with us so long; we will abuse the patience of God no longer, but begin to be absolutely his this day. If this may be the effect of these exhortations, you shall have the everlasting blessing; but if still you delay, I hope I am free from the guilt of your blood.