

PROCRASTINATION
OR
THE SIN AND FOLLY OF DEPENDING ON FUTURE TIME

By Jonathan Edwards

Proverbs 27:1

Boast not thyself of to-morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.

Subject: We ought to behave ourselves every day as though we had not dependence on any other day.

The design of the wise man in this book of Proverbs, is to give us the precepts of true wisdom, or to teach us how to conduct ourselves wisely in the course of our lives. Wisdom very much consists in making a wise improvement of time, and of the opportunities we enjoy. This is often in Scripture spoken of as a great part of true wisdom; as Deu. 32:29, “O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!” And Psa. 90:12, “So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.” So the wisdom of the wise virgins is represented as consisting much in this, that they improved the proper season to buy oil.

Therefore the wise man in these books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, agreeably to his design, insists on this part of wisdom. He tells us the advantage of seeking Christ early; Pro. 8:17. And advises us “to do what our hand findeth to do, with our might;” Ecc. 9:10. He advises young people to remember their Creator in the days of their youth, while the evil days come not, in which they shall say they have no pleasure; Ecc. 12:1. So here he advises us to a wise improvement of the present season. — In the words are two things to be particularly observed.

1. The precept, *not to boast of tomorrow; i.e.* not to speak or act as though it were our own. It is absurd for men to boast of that which is not theirs. The wise man would not have us behave ourselves as though any time were ours but the present. He that boasts of tomorrow, acts as though he had tomorrow in his possession, or had something whereby he might depend on it, and call it his own.

2. The reason given for this precept; *for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.* It is a good reason why we should not behave ourselves as though the morrow were our own, that indeed it is not; we are not sure of it; we have no hold of future time; we know not whether we shall see the morrow. Or if we do know that we shall see it, we know not what we shall see on it. — Hence, we ought to behave ourselves every day, as though we had no dependence on any other.

SECTION I
Needful precautions.

To prevent a misunderstanding of the doctrine, I observe that it is not meant, that we should in every respect behave as though we knew that we should not live another day. Not depending on another day, is a different thing, from concluding, that we shall not live another day. We may

have reason for the one, and not for the other. We have good reason to depend on another day, but we have no reason to conclude, that we shall not live another day.

In some respects we ought to carry ourselves, as though we know we should not live another day, and should improve every day as if it were the last. Particularly, we should live every day as conscientiously and as holily as if we knew it were the last. We should be as careful every day to avoid all sin, as if we knew that that night our souls should be required of us. We should be as careful to do every duty which God requires of us, and take as much care that we have a good account to give to our Judge, of our improvement of that day, as if we concluded that we must be called to give an account before another day.

But in many other respects, we are not obliged to behave ourselves as though we concluded that we should not live to another day. If we had reason to conclude that we should not live another day, some things would not be our duty which now are our duty. As for instance, in such a case it would not be the duty of any person to make provision for his temporal subsistence during another day. To neglect which, as things now are, would be very imprudent and foolish, as the consequences would show, if every man were to act in this manner. If so, it would never be man's duty to plow or sow the field, or to lay up for winter; but these things are man's duty; as Pro. 6:6, "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest." And chap. 10:5, etc. "He that gathereth in the summer is a wise son: but he that sleepeth in harvest, is a son that causeth shame." And many other places might be mentioned.

So, on the other hand, if we were certain that we should not live another day, some things would be our duty today, which now are not so. As for instance, it would be proper for us to spend our time in giving our dying counsels, and in setting our houses in order. If it were revealed to us, that we should die before tomorrow morning, we ought to look upon it as a call of God to us, to spend the short remainder of our lives in those things which immediately concern our departure, more than otherwise it would be our duty to do. — Therefore, the words which forbid us to boast of tomorrow, cannot be extended so far as to signify, that we ought *in all respects* to live, as if we knew we should not see another day. Yet they undoubtedly mean, that we ought not to behave ourselves in any respect, as though we *depended* on another day.

SECTION II

The precept explained.

Boast not thyself of tomorrow. In this precept two things seem to be forbidden.

First, boasting ourselves of what shall be on the morrow, or behaving ourselves as though we depended on particular things to come to pass in this world, in some future time. As when men behave themselves, as though they depended on being rich, or promoted to honor hereafter; or as though they were sure of accomplishing any particular design another day. So did the rich man in the gospel, when he did not only promise himself, that he should live many years, but promised himself also, that he should be rich many years. Hence he said to his soul, that *he had much goods laid up for many years.*

And if men act as though they depended upon it, that they should another day accomplish such and such things for their souls, then may they be said to boast themselves of tomorrow, and not to behave themselves as though they depended on no other day. As when they behave themselves, as though they depended upon it, that they should at another day have such and such advantages for the good of their souls; that they should at another day have the strivings of God's

Spirit; that they should at another day find themselves disposed to be thorough in seeking their salvation; that they should at another day have a more convenient season; and that God at another day would stand ready to hear their prayers, and show them mercy.

Or if they act as though they depended upon it that they should have considerable opportunity on a deathbed to seek mercy; or whatever they promise themselves should come to pass respecting them in this world, if they act as depending on it, they boast themselves of tomorrow.

Second, another thing implied, is our boasting of future time itself, or acting as though we depended on it, that we should have our lives continued to us another day. Not only is the command of God delivered in the text transgressed by those who behave themselves as depending upon it, that they shall see and obtain such and such things tomorrow; but by those who act as depending upon it, that they shall remain in being in this world tomorrow.

Both these ways of boasting of tomorrow are reproved by the apostle James, chap. 4:13, "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." By promising themselves that they shall do such and such things, and that they shall get gain, they boast themselves of what shall come to pass in such a time. The apostle in the next verse teaches them, that they ought not to do this, no nor so much as depend upon seeing another day, or on having their lives continued, verse 14, "Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow: for what is your life? It is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." And in verse 15 he teaches us that both are uncertain and dependent on the will of God, *viz.* Whether we shall live another day, and if we do, whether such and such things shall come to pass? "For that you ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this or that." Therefore he add in verse 16, "But now you rejoice in your boastings; all such rejoicing is evil."

SECTION III

When men act as though they depend on another day.

First, they will do so, if they *set their hearts* on the enjoyments of his life. I mean not, if they have any manner of affection to them. We may have some affection to the enjoyments of this world; otherwise they would cease to be enjoyments. If we might have no degree of rejoicing in them, we would not be thankful for them. Persons may in a degree take delight in earthly friends, and other earthly enjoyments. It is agreeable to the wise man's advice that we should do so. Ecc. 5:18, "It is good and comely for one to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all this labour that he taketh under the sun." — But by setting our hearts on these things, by placing our happiness on them, and letting out the current of our affections after them — by turning and fixing our inclinations so much upon them, that we cannot well enjoy ourselves without them, so that very much of the strength of the faculties of our minds is employed and taken up about these things — we show that we have our dependence on another day.

The man who doth, thus acts as though he depended on another day, yea many other days, in the world. For it is most evident, that if the enjoyments of this world be of such a nature that they are not to be depended on for one day more, they are not worth the setting of our hearts upon them, or the placing of our happiness in them. We may rejoice in the enjoyments of the world, but not in such a manner as to place the rest of our souls in them. As the apostle saith, we should rejoice in them as though we rejoiced not, 1 Cor. 7:30. So that if the joy should fail, our stock may hold good. And in this case we must behave ourselves only as if we had lost a small stream

of joy, but still had the fountain in full possession. We should conduct ourselves as those who have not the fountain of their joy shaken, though some appurtenances have failed. Our happiness as to *the body* of it, if I may so speak, should yet stand as on an immovable foundation.

They who are very much pleased and elated with the enjoyments of the world, certainly behave themselves as though they had much dependence on their continuance for more than one or two days more. — They who addict themselves to vain mirth, and lead a jovial life, show that they set their hearts on the enjoyments of the world, and act as those who depend on more days than the present. For if they were sensible, they could not depend on any future time, but that death would put an eternal end to all their carnal mirth before tomorrow, they would have no heart to spend the present day in such a manner as they now do. It would immediately produce in them a disposition far from levity and vanity.

And when persons are very much sunk with the loss of any temporal enjoyments, or with any temporal disappointments, it shows that they set their hearts upon them, and behave as though they boasted of tomorrow, and depended upon their long continuance of life. If they had no such dependence, they would not be overwhelmed by their frustration. If they be very much sunk, and the comfort of their lives destroyed by it, it shows that those temporal enjoyments were too much the foundation on which their comfort stood. That which makes a building totter, and threatens its destruction, is not the taking away of some of the exterior parts of the superstructure, but the removal of some considerable part of the foundation on which the house stands.

Second, if men are proud of their worldly circumstances, it shows that they have a dependence on tomorrow; for no man would think it worth his while to vaunt himself in that which is to be depended on only for a day. Though a man have a great estate today, he will not be puffed up with it, unless he depend upon having it tomorrow. A man who hath no dependence, but that he may tomorrow may be in the grave, where the small and great are upon a level, Job 3:19. Will not be much lifted up with his advancement to a post of honor. That person will not be proud of his rich and fine clothes, who is sensible that he may be stripped by death tomorrow, and sent out of the world, as he came naked into it. He will not today be very proud of his personal beauty, who hath no dependence on escaping tomorrow that stroke of death which will mar all his beauty, and make that face which he now thinks so comely, appear ghastly and horrid; when instead of a ruddy and florid countenance, there will be the blood settled, cold and congealed, the flesh stiff and clayey, the teeth set, the eyes fixed and sunk into the head. Nor will he today very much affect to beautify and adorn with gaudy and flaunting apparel, that body concerning which he is sensible that it may be wrapped in a winding sheet tomorrow, to be carried to the grave, there to rot, and be covered and filled with worms.

Third, when men envy others their worldly enjoyments, their wealth, their worldly ease, or their titles and high places — their sensual pleasures, or any of their worldly circumstances — it shows, that they set their hearts on the things of the world; and that they are not sensible that these things are not to be depended upon for another day. If they were, they would not think them worth their envy. They would appear so worthless in their eyes, that they would not care who had them, nor who went without them. — So when they contend about worldly possessions and enjoyments (as almost all the contentions that are in the world are about these things), it shows that they have dependence on tomorrow. Otherwise they would not think the enjoyments of the world worth contending about. They would be very much of the temper recommended by Jesus Christ. Mat. 5:40, “He that will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also.”

Fourth, men behave themselves as if they depended on another day, when they rest at ease today, in a condition out of which they must be delivered before they die. When a man's mind is at rest, there is something that he rests in. It must have some foundation, either real or imaginary. But if the man be in a condition from which he is sensible he must some time or other be delivered, or be undone, it is impossible that he should rest in the thoughts of remaining in his condition always, and never being delivered from it. For no man is willing to be ruined. No man can rest in that which he conceives to be connected with his own misery and undoing. — Therefore, if he rest in such a condition for the present, it must be on a supposition, that he shall be delivered from it. If he rest in it today, it must be because he depends on being delivered *another* day, and therefore depends on seeing another day.

We in this land generally profess, that as we are by sinful nature, we are exposed to eternal death, and that therefore there is a necessity that we get out of a natural condition some time before we die. And those among us who are sensible that they have never passed through any such change as in Scripture is called a *being born again*, though they be not sufficiently convinced that there is any such place as hell, yet have a kind of belief in it; at least they do not conclude that there is no such place, and therefore cannot but be sensible that it would be dreadful to die unconverted. Therefore, if they be in a considerable degree of ease and quietness in their condition, it must be because they have a dependence on being delivered out of such a condition some time before they die.

Inasmuch as they are easy, remaining in such a condition today, without any prospect of present deliverance, it shows plainly that they depend on another day. If they did not, they could have no quietness in their spirits; because, if there be no grounds of dependence on any further opportunity, then what they are exposed to, by missing the opportunity which they have today, is infinitely dreadful. — Persons who are secure in their sins, under the light of the gospel, unless they be deceived with a false hope, are generally so because they boast themselves of tomorrow. They depend on future opportunity; they flatter themselves with hopes of living long in the world; they depend on what shall come to pass hereafter; they depend on the fulfillment of their good intentions as to what they will do at a more convenient season.

Fifth, men behave themselves as those who depend on another day, when they neglect anything today which must be done before they die. If there be anything, which is absolutely necessary to be done sometime before death, and the necessity of it be sufficiently declared and shown to the person for whom it is thus necessary, if he neglects setting about it immediately, sincerely, and with all his might, certainly it carries this face with it, that the man depends upon its being done hereafter, and consequently that he shall have opportunity to do it. — Because, as to those things which are absolutely necessary to be done, there is need, not only of a possibility of a future opportunity; but of something which is to be depended on, some good ground to conclude that we shall have future opportunity. Therefore, whoever lives under this gospel, and does not this day thoroughly reform his life, by casting away every abomination, and denying every lust — and doth not apply himself to the practice of the whole of his duty towards God and man, and begin to make religion his main business — he acts as one who depends on another day; because he is abundantly taught that these things must be done before he dies.

Those who have been seeking salvation for a great while, in a dull, insincere, and slightly manner, and find no good effect of it, have abundant reason to conclude, that some time before they die, they must not only seek, but strive to enter in at the strait gate, and must be violent for the kingdom of heaven. And therefore, if they do not begin thus today, they act as those who depend on another day. — So those who have hitherto lived in the neglect of some particular

known duty, whether it be secret prayer, or paying some old debt, which they have long owed to their neighbor — or the duty of confessing some fault to a brother who hath aught against them, or of making restitution for some injury — they act as those who depend on another day.

Sixth, men behave themselves as though they depended on another day, if they do that today which some time or other must be undone. There are many things done by men which must be undone by them. They must go back again from the way which they have gone, or they are ruined to all eternity. Therefore, in doing these things, they act as those who depend on future opportunity to undo them. As when a man cheats or defrauds his neighbor in anything, he acts as one that boasts of tomorrow. For he must undo what he doth before he dies; he must some time or other make restitution, or divine justice, which oversees all things, and governs the whole world, and will see to it that right be done, will not let go its hold of him.

So when men hearken to temptation, and yield to the solicitations of their lusts to commit any sin they act as those who depend on another day. They do what must be undone. What they then do must be undone by hearty and thorough repentance, or they are ruined and lost forever. So if persons have been seeking salvation for a time, and afterwards are guilty of backsliding, and turn back after their hands have been put to the plow, they act as those who depend on another day. For what they now do, they must undo some time or other. They must go back again from their backsliding, and have all their work to do over again. And these things must be undone in this world, while men live; for there will be no undoing of them afterwards; they may be suffered for, but never can be undone.

SECTION IV

Why we ought not to boast of tomorrow.

I come now to show, why we ought not thus to boast ourselves of tomorrow; but on the contrary, to behave ourselves every day as though we had no dependence on another. And there is this plain and sufficient REASON for it, *viz.* that we have no grounds of dependence on another day. We have neither any foundation to depend upon seeing any particular things come to pass another day, which we may hope or wish for, nor upon enjoying another day in this world. We have nothing for a foundation of dependence that we shall not be in eternity before tomorrow, as both reason and experience show. — We have no promise of God that we shall ever see another day. We are in God's hands; our lives are in his hands; he hath set out bounds; the number of our months and days are with him; nor hath he told them to us. We see that the life of man at longest is very short, and nothing is more uncertain. And it is a thing universal among mankind, that they know not the day of their death. We see that great natural abilities, and sharpness of wit, and clearness of discernment, do not help to any discovery in this matter. Wise men are as uncertain of the term of their lives as others.

There are so many ways and means whereby the lives of men come to an end, that no circumstances in which a man can be are any security to him from death. That it is but a very little while till tomorrow, is no good ground of dependence that we shall live till then. We see that deaths as sudden as our dying before tomorrow morning, are common in the world. We very often see or hear of sudden deaths. How many suddenly, in a few minutes, pass from a state of health to a state of death, in the daytime, by several kinds of disease, which give no warning of their approach, and by many unforeseen accidents! How many go to sleep in health, and are found dead in their beds in the morning! So that our present health is no good ground of dependence that we shall live to see another day. — That persons are now in youth is no good

ground of dependence upon another day; for sudden unexpected deaths are common even among those who are in the bloom of youth. Nor is it any ground of dependence in this case, that a man is of a more than ordinary healthy and strong constitution. It is found by experience, that such are liable to sudden death as well as others. Job 21:23, "One dieth in his full strength. His breasts are full of milk, and his bones are moistened with marrow."

That persons have already lived to see a great many days, and that after they had been often in times past, told that they were uncertain of any future time. Or that persons have a strong desire to live longer; or that they are now very unprepared for death, both on temporal and spiritual accounts; is no ground of dependence on the future. Death tarries for no man, but comes when and to whom he is sent, and strikes the deadly blow, whether the man be prepared or not. That men have been very useful in their day, and that it is of great importance to their families and neighbors that they should live longer, is no ground of dependence. The most useful men are often cut down by death, in the midst of their usefulness. The same may be said, though we cannot see which way death should come at us before tomorrow. To how many accidents, to how many diseases, are we liable, which may prove fatal before tomorrow, which yet it is impossible for us to foresee! So, if we be very careful of our lives, and our health, not to expose ourselves to any dangers, still this is no ground of dependence as to any future time. Death comes in many ways which were not thought of. Men foresee not the means of their death, any more than the fish securely swimming in the water foresee the net, or the bird that securely feeds upon the bait sees the snare. It is as the wise man observes, in Ecc. 9:12, "For man also knoweth not his time; as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them."

SECTION V

Serious inquiries.

I shall improve this doctrine, by putting you upon examining yourselves, whether you do not boast yourselves of tomorrow, or whether you do not live in such a manner as you would not, were it not that you depend on future time and future opportunity in the world. Would not your behavior be very different from what it now is, if you every day lived and acted without any dependence on seeing one day more? — You cannot but acknowledge it to be most reasonable, that you should live and act thus. You cannot but own, that you have no good ground of dependence on another day; and therefore that you cannot act wisely any otherwise than in acting as one who hath no dependence on any such thing. Therefore inquire whether you act wisely and reasonably in this respect.

First, do you not set your hearts much more on this world, than you would, if you had no dependence on the morrow? Is not the language of the rich man in the gospel, the secret language of your hearts? "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years," etc. Is not this the language of your hearts, with respect to what you have gotten already; which makes you place your happiness so much in it? And with respect to what of the world you are seeking and pursuing, is it not with a dependence on enjoying it for a great while, when you shall have obtained it? Are not your lands and other possessions which you have gotten, or are about to get, in your own imagination, yours for a great while? — Would your mind be so filled with thoughts and cares about these things, so much to the exclusion of another world. Would you lay yourselves under so great disadvantages for your soul's good, by involving yourselves in worldly cares, if you had no dependence on having anything to do with these things for more than the present day? If you

did not depend on considerably more time in the world, would your inquiry be so much, What shall we eat, and what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed? And so little, How shall we make our calling and election sure? How shall we be assured that we are upon a good foundation for another world, and that we are in such a state, that death cannot hurt us? How shall we be sure that we are ready to appear before the judgment-seat of a heart-searching God? — Would there be so much of your time spent in laying up treasure on earth — and so little in laying up treasure in heaven, that you might have store against the day of death — were it not that you put death at a distance? Would you be so much raised at your temporal prosperity, and so much sunk when you meet with crosses and disappointments in your worldly affairs, if you did not think that continuance in the world is to be depended on for more days than the present? — Let those who very much affect to adorn their bodies in gaudy apparel, inquire whether they would think it worth their while to spend so much time to make themselves fine, and to set themselves forth as gayer than others, if they really had no dependence that their bodies would be preserved one day longer from being clasped in the cold arms of death?

Second, inquire, whether you would not much less meddle with the concerns of others, and be much more employed with your own hearts, if each day you had no dependence on living another day. If you were sensible that you had had no other day to depend upon than this, you would be sensible that you had great affairs of your own to attend to. You would find a great deal of business at home between God and your own soul. And considering that you cannot depend upon another day, it would seem to you that you have but a short time in which to do it, and that therefore you have need to be much engaged. You would find so much to be done, and so much difficulty in doing it, that you would have little leisure, and little heart, to intermeddle with the business of others. Your business would be confined to a much narrower compass. You would have so much to do at home in your closets, and with your own hearts, that you would find no occasion to go abroad for intermeddling business to fill up your time.

But the truth is, men conceive a great deal of time which they have to be filled up, and hence they want business. They depend on tomorrow, and the day following, and next month, and next year, yea many years to come. When they are young they depend on living to be middle-aged, and when middle-aged they depend on old age, and always put far away the day of death. Let them be young or old, there always seems to them to be a great vacancy between them and death. Hence they wander to and fro for business to fill up that vacancy. — Whereas if they were sensible of the uncertainty of life, they would, in the first place, make sure of their own business. The business of their own precious, immortal souls would be done, before they would attend much to the business of other people. They would have no desire or disposition to concern themselves with every private quarrel which breaks out in the neighborhood. They would not think it much concerned them to inquire into the matter, and to pass their censure on the affair. They would find something else to do, than to sit by the hour together, discussing and censuring the conduct of such and such persons, gathering up or rehearsing the stories which are carried about to the disadvantage of this and that person.

We seldom, if ever, see men who are upon sickbeds, and look upon themselves very dangerously sick, disposed to spend their time in this manner. And the reason is, that they look upon it doubtful whether they shall live long. They do not, so much as others, depend on much time to spare. Hence their minds are taken up more about their own souls' concerns, than about the concerns of others. So it would be with persons in health, if their health did not make them depend on a great deal of time in the world.

Third, if you each day depend on no other than but the present, would you not engage and interest yourselves much less in party designs and schemes, than you are now wont to do? Among a people divided into two parties, as this town hath been for a long time, there is commonly much done by the partisans in forming schemes of opposition to one another. There is always a strife, who shall get their wills and carry their point. This often engages them, if not in open quarrels, in secret intrigues. That there is so much done in these things, is a certain evidence that they boast themselves of tomorrow, and put death at a distance.

Men would certainly find themselves very much indisposed to such things, if they were so sensible of the uncertainty of life, as to depend on no other day than the present. It is therefore very proper, that you should examine yourselves in this particular, at this time. If you really depended on no other day than the present, would your hearts be so much engaged in strife between two parties, as they often are? Would your spirits be so often raised and ruffled? Would you go about with so much prejudice against such and such men; harboring so much of the old leaven, which so often breaks out in heats of spirit; and, as an old sore which was skinned over, but not cured, set to raging with a touch which would not have hurt sound flesh? — Commonly in the management of a strife between two parties, there is a great deal of envy. When any who belong to one of the parties seem to prosper, the other party will envy them; it is a grievous thing to them. So there is also much contempt. When one of the parties gets the ascendant a little over the other, they are ready to make the utmost improvement of it, and to insult the other party. — And there is commonly in such cases a great deal of mutual secret reproach. When those of one party get together, then is the time to inveigh against those of the other party, and to set forth their injustice and their fraudulent practices. Then is the time for them to pass their censure on their words and actions. Then is the time to expose their own surmises and suspicions of what the other party intends, what it aims at in such and such things, what the purposes of individuals are, and what they suppose their secret actions are. — Then is the time for all that are friends in the cause, and engaged in the same designs, to entertain one another by ridiculing the words and actions of the other party, and to make themselves sport of their folly and disappointments; and much is done at calling one another *Raca* and *fools*, or other names equivalent, if not much more than equivalent. Then is the time to lay their heads together, to plot and contrive how they shall manage such an affair so as to disappoint the other party, and obtain their own wills.

Brethren, these things ought not so to be among a Christian people; especially among a people that has made the profession which we have made. Nor would they be so if it were not for your dependence on much future time in the world. If you were so sensible of your continual liableness to death, that every day was the last you depended upon, these things certainly would not be so. For let us but consider what are the effects of death with respect to such things. It puts an end to party-quarrels. Many men hold these quarrels as long as they live. They begin young, and hold on through many great and sore afflictions and chastisements of Providence. The old sore remains, when the supporters of nature bow, and the eyes grow dim, and the hands tremble with age. But death, when that comes, puts an end to all their quarreling in this world. Death silences the most clamorous, and censorious, and backbiting tongue. When men are dead, they cease to lay schemes against those of another party. Death dashes all their schemes, so far as they have any concern in them. *Psa. 146:4*, “His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.”

When men are dead, they cease to bite and devour others; as it is said to have been of old a proverb among the Egyptians, *Dead men do not bite*. There are many who will bite and devour as long as they live, but death tames them. Men could not be quiet or safe by them while alive,

but none will be afraid of them when dead. The bodies of those that made such a noise and tumult when alive, when dead, lie as quietly among the graves of their neighbors as any others. Their enemies, of whom they strove to get their wills while alive, get their wills of them when they are dead. Nothing can please their enemies better than to have them out of their way. It suits them, that those who were so troublesome to them, are locked up safe in the close grave, where they will no more stand in their way. — There are no more effects of their pride, their craftiness, their hatred and envy. Ecc. 9:6, “Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy is now perished.”

The time will soon come, when you who have for many years been at times warmly contending one with another, will be very peaceable as to this world. Your dead bodies will probably lie quietly together in the same burying place. If you do not leave off contending before death, how natural will it be for others to have such thoughts as these, when they see your corpses; What! Is this the man who used to be so busy in carrying on the designs of his party? Oh, now he has done. Now he hath no more any part in any of these things. Now it doth not at all concern him, who get their wills, or what party is uppermost. We shall hear his voice no more in our *town meetings*. He will not sit any more to reproach and laugh at others. He is gone to appear before his Judge, and to receive according to his conduct in life. — The consideration of such things as these would certainly have a mighty effect among us, if we did not put far away the day of death. If all acted every day as not depending on any other day, we should be a peaceful, quiet people.

Fourth, inquire, whether or no you do not allow yourselves in some things, and endeavor to flatter yourselves that there is no evil in them which you would by no means dare to do if you had not a dependence on living till tomorrow. It is very common among men, when they are strongly enticed to some sinful practice, by their worldly interest, or by their carnal appetites, to pretend that they do not think there is any evil in it; when indeed they know better. Their pretense is only to serve a present turn. And if they expected to have their souls required of them that night, they would by no means dare to persist in the practice. — Therefore examine the liberties you take by this test. What would you think of them, if you now should have the following news sent you by some messenger from heaven; John, or Thomas (or whatever your name be), this night shall thy soul be required of thee. How would such tidings strike you! How would they alter the face of things! Doubtless your thoughts would be very quick; you would soon begin to reflect on yourselves, and to examine your past and present conduct. And in what colors would the liberties you now take, appear to you in the case now supposed? Would you then conclude, that there is no evil in them? Would you not be less bold to go forward and meet death, for having continued in such practices? Would you dare to commit such acts again before you die, which now you pretend are lawful? Would not the few hours which you would have to live, be at all the more uncomfortable to you for having done such things? Would you not presently wish that you had let them alone? Yea, would they not appear frightful and terrifying to you? If it be thus, it is a sign that the reason why you now allow yourselves in them, and plead for their lawfulness, is that you put death at a distance, and depend on many other days in the world.

Fifth, inquire, whether you do not some things on the presumption, that you shall hereafter repent of them. Is not this the very thing which causes you to dare to do some things? Is it not the very ground on which you venture to gratify your lusts? Let young people examine all their secret carriage; what they do alone in the dark and in secret corners. God knoweth, and your own hearts know, though men do not. Put the question impartially to your own consciences; is not this

the very thing that gives you courage, that God is very merciful, and that he often of his sovereign mercy gives repentance of great sins, and even willful sins, and in consequence of repentance forgives? And so you hope that one day or other he will do so to you. You intend some time hereafter earnestly to seek; and you hope you shall be awakened. And if you be very earnest, as you intend to be, you hope you shall be converted, and then you shall be forgiven, and it will be as well as if you had never committed such sins.

If this be the case, consider how you boast of tomorrow, and foolishly depend on future opportunity to repent, as well as foolishly presume on the mercy of God to give you repentance, at the same time that you take a course to provoke God, forever to give you up to a sealed hardness and blindness, and to a most fearful damnation; not considering that God will glorify his revenging justice as well as his mercy; nor remembering the sad example of Esau, “who for a morsel of meat sold his birthright; and afterwards, 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. 12:16, 17.

Sixth, inquire, whether you improve this day, as one who doth not depend upon ever having opportunity to keep another Sabbath, or to hear or read another discourse. It appears from what hath been already said, that you have no grounds to depend on any more such opportunities. Now the day is present, and so you are in the better capacity to determine how it is with you. It is but for you to reflect upon yourselves, to look inward, and see how it is with you at this present time. And how is it? Are you as strict and as diligent in keeping this Sabbath, watching your thoughts, keeping your hearts, striving in duties both public and private, and improving ordinances, as might be expected of one who hath no dependence on ever enjoying such an opportunity anymore; one who doth not depend on ever setting foot again within the walls of God’s house? — Do you attend to this address with that care, and desire, and endeavor to improve it for your good, as you would, if you did not depend upon it, that your bodies would not be in the grave, and your souls fixed in eternity, in their unalterable state, before the next Sabbath?

Seventh, are you careful to see to it that grounds of your hope are good? A man who hath some hope of being in a state of acceptance with God, but is not sure, if he had no dependence on any other day’s opportunity of making it sure, would be very strict in examining himself and searching the grounds of his hope, and would not rest in an uncertainty. He would be very thorough in informing himself what might be depended on as good evidence of an interest in Christ, and what not; and would be exceedingly strict in searching his own heart, to see whether there was anything in him that comes up to the requisites laid down in the Scriptures. — If what appears hopeful in him were dim and obscure, he would set himself very earnestly to obtain that which would be more clear and manifest, and would cry earnestly to God for it, and would apply himself to a diligent use of means in order to it. And good reason why; for he depends on no other opportunity to make his calling and election sure, than what he hath today. Inquire therefore whether you be thus thorough in examining your hope. And are you thus careful effectually to see to it, that you are on a sure foundation? If not, then you behave yourselves as those that depend on tomorrow.

SECTION VI

How to spend every day.

God hath concealed from us the day of our death, without doubt, partly for this end, that we might be excited to be always ready, and might live as those that are always waiting for the

coming of their Lord, agreeably to the counsel which Christ gives us, Mat. 24:42, 43, 44; 25:13, and Mark 13:32, etc. — That watchman is not faithful who, being set to defend a house from thieves, or a city from an enemy at hand, will at any hour venture to sleep, trusting that the thief or the enemy will not come. Therefore it is expected of the watchman, that he behave himself every hour of the night, as one who doth not depend upon it that the enemy will tarry until the next hour. Now therefore let me, in Christ's name, renew the call and counsel of Jesus Christ to you, to watch as those that know not what hour your Lord will come. Let me call upon you who are hitherto in an unrenewed condition. Depend not upon, that you will not be in hell before tomorrow morning. You have no reason for any such dependence. God hath not promised to keep you from it, or to withhold his wrath so long.

How can you reasonably be easy or quiet for one day, or one night, in such a condition, when you know not but your Lord will come this night? And if you should then be found, as you now are, unregenerate, how unprepared would you be for his coming, and how fearful would be the consequence! Be exhorted therefore, for your own sakes, immediately to awake from the sleep of sin, out of sleep, and sleep no more, as not depending on any other day. — Let me exhort you to have no dependence on any future time; to keep every Sabbath, and to hear every sermon, as if it were the last. And when you go into your closet, and address yourself to your Father who seeth in secret, do it in no dependence on any future opportunity to perform the same duty. When you that are young go into company for amusement and diversion, consider that it may be the *last* opportunity of the like nature that ever you may have. In all your dealings with your neighbors, act as if you were never to make another bargain. Behave in your families everyday, as though you depended on no other. — Here I shall offer you two motives.

First, consider, if you will hearken to this counsel, how much it will tend to your safety and peace in life and death. It is the way really and truly to be ready for death; yea, to be fit to live or fit to die; to be ready for affliction and adversity, and for whatever God in his providence shall bring upon you. It is the way to be in, not only an habitual, but actual preparedness for all changes, and particularly for your last change. — It is the way to possess your souls in a serene and undisturbed peace, and to enable you to go on with an immovable fortitude of soul, to meet the most frightful changes, to encounter the most formidable enemies, and to be ready with unshaken confidence to triumph over death whenever you meet him; to have your hearts fixed, trusting in God, as one that stands on a firm foundation, and hath for his habitation the munition of rocks, that is not afraid of evil tidings, but laughs at the fear of the enemy. It will be the way for you to possess the quietness and assurance spoken of. Isa. 32:17, "The work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever." — The servant who always stands watching, will not be at all surprised at the news that his Lord is coming. This will be the way for you to live above the fear of death. Yea, if heaven and earth should shake, you may stand firm and unshaken, being settled on a rock, which cannot be removed, but abideth forever. O how happy are such persons, who have such safety and peace! What a blessed peace is that which arises from such a constant preparation for death! How happy therefore is that servant whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing!

Second, what dismal calamities and miseries mankind are subject to for want of this, for want of behaving themselves every day, as not depending on any future day! The way of the world is, one day foolishly to depend on another, yea on many others. And what is the consequence? Why, the consequence with respect to the greater part of the world is, that they live all their days without any true peace or rest of soul. They are all their lifetime subject to bondage through fear of death. And when death sensibly approaches they are put into a terrible

fright. They have a dismal view of their past lives. The ill improvement of their time, and the sins they have been guilty of, stand staring them in the face, and are more frightful to them than so many devils. And when they look forward into that eternity whither they are going, how dismal is the prospect! O how do their hearts shrink at the thought of it! They go before the judgment-seat of God, as those that are dragged thither, while they would gladly, if they would, hide themselves in the caves and dens of the earth.

And what is worse yet than all the disquietude and terror of conscience in this world. The consequence of a contrary behavior, with respect to the bulk of mankind, is their eternal perdition. They flatter themselves that they shall see another day, and then another, and trust to that, until finally most of them are swallowed up in hell, to lament their folly to all eternity, in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone. — Consider how it was with all the foolish virgins who trusted to the delay of the bridegroom's coming. When he came they were surprised, and found unprepared, having no oil in their lamps. And while they went to buy, those who were ready went in with him to the marriage; and the door was shut against them, and they came afterwards crying in vain, *Lord, Lord, open to us.*

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