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12 mo  
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Conf Pam 12mo #575

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## MY SPIRIT SHALL NOT ALWAYS STRIVE."

BY REV. J. H. FOWLES, OF S. C.

THERE is a period in the life of man, to which if he live in a state of perverseness and impenitence, his cup of iniquity will be full; and to him "there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, but a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation." There is some *one* of a series of rebellious acts, which, when committed, constitutes a point beyond which no ray of mercy will ever reach him.

So perverse and so sinful is the heart of man, that, left to himself, perdition will ensue. So bent is he on transgression, so alienated from God and holiness, that unless God induces him, by the aid of his Spirit, to forsake and repent of sin, he will persist in iniquity, and perish. That soul from whom the Spirit has taken his final flight, is *lost*.

This truth is taught explicitly in the word of God. "My Spirit shall not always strive with man." "My people would not hearken to my voice, so I gave them up unto their own hearts' lusts; and they walked in their own counsels." "Though they cry unto me, I will not hearken unto them." "Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven." "For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections." "For this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned who believe not the truth, but have pleasure in unrighteousness." "Ephraim is joined to his idols; let him alone." They rebelled and vexed the Holy Spirit; therefore he was turned to be their enemy and fought against him."

Thus the word of the Lord establishes the truth, that there is a period *somewhere* in the progress of man through this world, to which if he live in rebellion against his Maker, God's forbearance and mercy will be extended to him no longer; beyond which the Spirit of the Lord is "turned to be his enemy, and fights against him;" beyond which his damnation is sealed.

The sinner knows not at any moment, whether he have already passed the line which separates the land of hope from the land of despair; whether it lies far in the region of the future, or whether he stand on its verge. God has fixed this line, but to none other has he revealed where it lies. The impenitent transgressor goes onward in life at the hazard, and under the imminent peril, at each step, of passing the bounds of the region of hope and barring on himself eternally the doors of the kingdom of heaven. The next immoral act, for aught that is revealed, may be *the act* which fills to overflowing the cup of his iniquity. A vessel nearly filled may run over by adding another *drop*. Though the sin may not be of so deep a dye as a series of others of which he has been guilty, yet *this* added to the long catalogue of his former crimes, may close his probation. This as the last crowning act of rebellion, may seal his doom.

A benevolent father may for ever disinherit his son for some seemingly venial act of transgression. This act is *the occasion*, not the *cause* of his disinheritance. A long series of rebellious acts may have evinced a spirit of irreconcilable aversion and hostility to the parent. Repeated persuasions and reproof have been tried, but he still continues in his wayward course. Repeated acts of disobedience, enhance his guilt. The father now determines to execute his threatening on occasion of the *next* transgression. The son persists; he commits an act, not perhaps as glaringly vicious as some which have preceded it, but still evincing a spirit of insubordination. The father fulfils his threatening, and disinherits him for ever.

So God on the occasion of some seemingly venial sin—but be it remembered, no sin is small—may determine to dry up the fountain of his mercy; when the sinner cries, not to hearken; to “laugh at his calamity, and mock when his fear cometh.” Nay, refusal on the part of the sinner to comply *now* with the call of mercy, and yield his heart to God, may be *the act*, which when connected with the heinous sins already noted in the great book of remembrance, Jehovah determines to make the occasion of his Spirit’s final flight, and of the sealed perdition of the soul.

Go, stand by the death-bed of the aged, obdurate sinner; watch his restless and impure spirit, which is about to be yielded into the hands of him who gave it. He writhes, it is true under bodily torture, but this bears no contrast with the in-

ward fire. Despair is depicted in his countenance. He alternately supplicates and blasphemes his Maker. He already experiences the gnawings of "the worm that dieth not," and of "the fire that is not quenched." His doom is *sealed*. But *when?* Perhaps not in his dying hour. In the mind of God, it may be his present despair and future torments are connected with some distant scene in the past, where, as he was seated under the droppings of the sanctuary, listened to the proclamation of the gospel, heard the claims of God in Christ enforced thought of duty and the yielding of his heart—he deferred obedience to the Spirit's dictates to a more convenient season; and the heavenly messenger, thus grieved and mocked, took his final flight.

Reader, *the brevity and uncertainty of life are not the only inducements to immediate repentance.*

True, this life is "a vapor, that appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away." It is as "the flower of the grass which before the burning heat of the sun, withereth." It is indeed, when most protracted, but a short period to employ in winning a crown of glory. Its *uncertainty*, too—for who knoweth he shall see to-morrow?—is forcibly presented in the Scriptures, to wean from sin and draw to duty *now*. But with all these warnings sounding in his ears, under the delusions of sin, man practically views this world as his eternal home. He feels and rejoices in his present health and vigor, and thinks not that his body will soon die.

Yet mark, impenitent fellow-man, *God's grace is sovereign*. Though your life be protracted to the end of the world; though you were assured by God you should not die until "the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat," it becomes you not to defer repentance to a future day.

The inspired truth, "*Now is the accepted time, behold, now is the day of salvation,*" receives not all its solemnity and force from the brevity and uncertainty of life. It has another and more fearful import: "My Spirit shall not always strive with man." The Holy Spirit may "turn to be thine enemy and fight against thee." The mandate may go forth, "He is joined to his idols; let him alone." Then, like the barren fig-tree, you will be cut down while yet you stand. In a world of hope, you will be in despair; in the

midst of life, you will be in death; on this side the grave, you will yet be in hell.

Suffer me, then, affectionately, but honestly, to remind you that your state is fearfully critical and dangerous. Snares are beneath your feet. While remaining in impenitence, *you go onward*, not knowing but *the next step* your damnation will be certain—irretrievable. Fellow-man, stay your feet. Take not the fatal step. It may be you are on the verge of that line, beyond which all is darkness, despair and death. The pressing calls of God, by his providence, his word, and his preached gospel, to repent, you have rejected. When aroused to the consideration of duty, you have heedlessly postponed its claims, and relapsed into listlessness and sin. Days speed away; Sabbath succeeds Sabbath; year after year is numbered with the past—and you are still the enemy of God. The time *will* come, if you persist, when by some act of transgression, you will eternally mar the prospect of your salvation. May not *the present* be that critical moment, and your *next act* the act which will destroy your soul? May not the act be your neglecting *now* the offer of mercy?

I shrink from the possibility of being made the instrument of your ruin; but this very warning, rejected, may seal your doom. Oh, I beseech you, in Christ's stead, suffer it not to pass unimproved, adding despair to doubt, and endless death to death.

The message is, "God in Christ Jesus is reconciling the world unto himself." The command has gone forth from God to all men everywhere, "Repent." The command to thee, fellow-sinner, is, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," and the promise is, "Thou shalt be saved." But the fearful alternative made known by God, immutably true, is, "If thou believest not, thou shalt be damned." Embrace the offer of salvation *now*, lest it prove your last opportunity—lest God lift his hand and swear, "You shall not enter into my rest." After his irrevocable word is passed, your awful doom may indeed excite the compassion of God; he may lament over you, as over Jerusalem, "O that thou hadst known, even thou, in this thy day, the things that belong to thy peace;" yet it will be no less certain, "they are hid from thine eyes." Your doom will then be sealed. Your soul lost—lost for eternity.

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