

There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God

“There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.” Heb. 4:9. This is my text for today. It is also the text of a wonderful, huge book, entitled The Saints’ Everlasting Rest – or, subtitled – A Treatise of the Blessed State of the Saints in Their Enjoyment of God in Heaven, by Richard Baxter, who lived from 1615 to 1691. He died at 76 years of age. You probably noticed that Baxter was a contemporary and a fellow Englishman of Joseph Caryl, – who lived from 1602 to 1673 and was 72 years of age when he died, – who also wrote a huge book, during the same period that Baxter was at work on his book.

Caryl’s massive work was simply entitled, An Exposition of Job. Some 55 years ago I came by greatly-abridged copies of both of those old puritan books, and tracked down an UNABRIDGED copy – (in fact, it was an ORIGINAL copy, now almost 400 years old) – of Caryl’s 2-volume work on Job. You may see from these books on the table, what a vast difference there is in the size of the 2 huge UNABRIDGED volumes, and the rather small ABRIDGED volume. You also may see that the abridged copy of Baxter’s book is almost as large as the abridged copy of Caryl’s book. We should continue to look for the UNABRIDGED work of Baxter; to wit: The Saints’ Everlasting Rest.

LET US FIND THE ORIGINAL BOOK: THE SAINTS’ EVERLASTING REST

The Internet has provided us with some sheets of Baxter’s book, available to all for the downloading; together with what is called, “An Introductory Essay by Thomas Erskine,” dated in 1824. Erskine says that Baxter wrote The Saints’ Everlasting Rest, ON A BED OF SICKNESS; and that, *“It contains those thoughts and feelings, which occupied, and fortified, and animated the Author, as he stood on the brink of eternity.”*

We should continue to search for Baxter’s book, I repeat – UNABRIDGED – and in the ORIGINAL, if possible – more than 350 years old. Baxter says, *“The Saints’ Rest is the most happy state of a Christian; it is the perfect endless enjoyment of God by the perfected saints, according to the measure of their capacity, to which their souls arrive at death, and both soul and body most fully, after the resurrection and final judgment.”*

It would be a wonderful thing, Beloved, if you would read and thoroughly digest Baxter’s Book; if you would walk in Baxter’s footsteps, think Baxter’s thoughts with him, as it were, such thoughts as those that produced polished sentences and phrases as the following that define and explain The Saints’ Everlasting Rest; to wit: *“It is a rest from all controversy with God – from all opposition to his will. His servants serve him. Farewell, vain world! no rest hast thou to offer, which can compare with this. The night is far spent; soon will that day dawn, and the shadows flee away.”*

Moreover, it is phenomenal – the way in which the wonderful providence of God has preserved Baxter’s Book through the centuries of time. For example, how the Book came to find its way to Harvard College Library in America in 1724, some 70 years after its first publication. And who, – if anybody – tampered with it? Then, on January 1, 1759, how did the huge Book find its way into the peculiar possession of Benjamin Fawcett, for his reduction of it all into a relatively small ABRIDGEMENT.

Then, in 1833, the strangest of all came about, that a brand new publication of the Baxter Book by the publishing firm of Perkins & Marvin of Boston, New York, and Philadelphia – as a commercial publishing venture – with “An Introductory Essay by Thomas Erskine, Esq., ADVOCATE” – (what’s a LAWYER now doing in the mix?). What is it that Lawyer Erskine is ADVOCATING? What do we need with his so-called “Introductory Essay?” tacked on to Baxter’s masterpiece nearly 200 years after it was written? An “Essay” that is some 30 pages long! Well, if you read that thing carefully, you might conclude that Lawyer Erskine was a raving Arminian heretic bent on sabotaging Calvinist Baxter’s famous book, either for pecuniary profit, for religious advantage, or on a Satanic impulse. At any rate, after praising Baxter for several pages, shyster lawyer Erskine commences a shyster lawyer-type attack on Baxter for preaching too much on Hell-fire and brimstone. Lawyer Erskine “*Damns with faint praise,*” to borrow a line from Shakespeare. He says that he agrees with what Baxter says, but he disagrees with how Baxter says it.

Beloved, this is a Satanic tactic with which we are very, very familiar. It is a device of Satan which we should recognize for what it is – and guard against it as against a soul-damning plague. For example, Lawyer Erskine praises Baxter to the skies for about nine pages; in glowing language such as this; to wit: “*We assuredly do not know any author who can be compared with him, for the power with which he brings his reader directly face to face, with death, and judgment, and eternity; and compels him to look upon them, and converse with them.*”

HERETIC TALK: “I AGREE WITH YOUR MESSAGE, BUT NOT YOUR *MANNER*”

Then Erskine lowers the boom in Satanic criticism of Baxter’s “*MANNER of stating divine truth.*” When you hear those words, Beloved, Watch Out! Listen for the serpent’s hiss in Lawyer Erskine’s next words; to wit: “*But on such a subject – (i.e., Baxter’s preaching and writing) – on such a subject praise is superfluous, as it is easy; AND WE SHALL RATHER BEG THE ATTENTION OF OUR READERS to some observations on his MANNER OF STATING DIVINE TRUTH, and on the interesting subject of the work before us – (to wit: the doctrine of HELL).*” Beloved, when some yahoo says he agrees with your message, but disagrees with your manner of delivering it – WATCH OUT! Lest it be with you as it was with Abner, when “*Joab took him aside in the gate to speak with him quietly, and smote him there under the fifth rib, that he died.*” 2 Sam. 3:27.

When some yahoo begins to quibble with you about Hell, saying that he agrees with you about Hell, but he disagrees with your MANNER of preaching about Hell – i.e., you are too harsh and not compassionate enough – WATCH OUT! You are dealing with a God-loves-everybody Arminian Heretic who DOES NOT believe in Hell. We can learn some valuable lessons from the history of Baxter’s Book, as it made its way down through the centuries, silently dealing with and exposing the likes of shyster Lawyer Erskine. Who let Erskine get his heretical hands on Baxter’s Book, to write an impressive “Introductory Essay” thereto, – and thereby poisoning the well at its source? Interesting to know the details of how heretic Lawyer Erskine swung that deal.

“For there *MUST BE* also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.” 1 Cor. 11:19.

Having announced that he would make some innocent-sounding “*observations on Baxter’s MANNER of stating divine truth,*” snake-boy Erskine proceeds as follows, and lets the cat out of the bag; to wit: “*In the first place, then, there is perhaps, too little appearance of compassion, and too much detail in his descriptions of the punishments after death – (i.e., HELL).*”

I have thought for some time, that Jonathan Edwards’ great and famous sermon, – “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” – was mightily inspired and influenced by Baxter’s even greater and even more famous, book. Recall, that Edwards preached his sermon in 1741 when he was 38 years of age; whereas, Baxter first published his Book in 1649 when he was 34 years of age. Thus it was that Edwards had plenty of opportunity to read and re-read – and diligently study – again and again, The Saints’ Everlasting Rest. And I am convinced that he did so. And that he was inspired thereby to write and deliver his famous sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.”

“SINNERS IN THE HANDS OF AN ANGRY GOD”

Listen to some of the colorful language of Edwards, compared to that of Baxter; to wit:

“The God that holds you over the pit of hell much as one holds a spider or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked; his wrath toward you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else but to be cast into the fire; he is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are ten thousand times so abominable in his eyes as the most hateful and venomous serpent is in ours. You have offended him infinitely more than ever a stubborn rebel did his prince; and yet it is nothing but his hand that holds you from falling into the fire every moment. ‘Tis ascribed to nothing else, that you did not go to hell last night; that you were suffered to awake again in this world after you closed your eyes to sleep, and there is no other reason to be given why you have not dropped into hell since you arose in the morning, but that God’s hand has held you up.”

Now that, Beloved, is vintage Jonathan Edwards, and is in every high school literature book as an example of how they used to preach throughout America and England two or three centuries ago. And only eternity will show how many preachers – like Jonathan Edwards – have been inspired and influenced to boldly preach God’s Word by Baxter’s Book, The Saints’ Everlasting Rest. Now, please, hear some of Baxter’s words, compared to Edwards’ words, which I just now read you; to wit:

“Poor souls (in Hell)! what a misery will that life be, where you shall have nothing but sorrow; intense heart-piercing, multiplied sorrow; when you shall neither have the joys of saints, nor your own former joys! Do you think there is one merry heart in Hell? or one joyful countenance, or jesting tongue?”

“The loss of the saints’ everlasting rest – (i.e., the eternal loss of heaven itself) – will be greatly aggravated by suffering the torments of hell. The exceeding greatness of such torments may appear by considering – the principal Author of them, who is God himself! – the place or state of torment; – that these torments are

the fruits of divine VENGEANCE – that the Almighty TAKES PLEASURE in them – (that Christ and his saints and angels themselves shall be God’s executioners) – that these torments shall be universal – without mitigation – and without end.”

And again, Baxter says – (let me interpose here, that I have hard evidence that The Saints’ Everlasting Rest has been important to me for at least 48 years, – and probably closer to 55 years – but at least 48 years, because 48 years ago we named our dear little newborn son after Richard Baxter) – (and, let us never name a child, Erskine) – so, back to excerpts showing with what frightening detail Baxter handled the torments of hell; to wit:

“The principal author of hell-torments is God himself. As it was no less than God whom the sinners had offended, so it is no less than God who will punish them for their offences. He hath prepared those torments for his enemies. His continued anger will still be devouring them. His breath of indignation will kindle the flames. His wrath will be an intolerable burden to their souls. If it were but a creature they had to do with, they might better bear it. Woe to him that falls under the strokes of the Almighty! ‘It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.’ What a consuming fire is his wrath! If it be kindled here but a little, how do we wither like the grass! How soon doth our strength decay and turn to weakness, and our beauty to deformity. The flames do not so easily run through the dry stubble, as the wrath of God will consume these wretches...If thy strength were as iron, and thy bones as brass; if thy foundation were as the earth, and thy power as the heavens, yet shouldst thou perish at the breath of his indignation. HOW MUCH MORE, when thou art but a piece of breathing clay, kept a few days from being eaten with worms, by the mere support and favor of him whom thou art thus resisting.”

HARD TO TELL JONATHAN EDWARDS FROM RICHARD BAXTER

It is hard to tell which of these preachments are Jonathan Edwards’, in ‘Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God’ – and which are Richard Baxter’s, in The Saints’ Everlasting Rest. So, what does shyster lawyer Erskine have to say in petty, heretical, Arminian criticism masquerading as a Johnny-come-lately, “An Introductory Essay?” Here’s what the weasel has to say; to wit: *“In the first place, then, there is perhaps, too little appearance of compassion, and too much detail in his descriptions of the punishments after death.”* What a bucket of warm spit! And it gets worse; to wit: *“The general idea – (i.e., the general idea about Hell! – the general idea about Hell, for crying out loud!) – the general idea about hell is all that is given in Scripture, and even that is rarely insisted on, except by our Lord himself; as if such a fearful denunciation could only have its right effect, when pronounced by the lips of him who is love itself. It is not to the statement of the doctrine that we object; but to the MANNER OF DOING IT!”* This silliness is breathtaking! It is shocking for its sheer stupidity.

It must be read and re-read to deal with its many errors in such a short space; and before we sort all those errors out, here comes another batch; to wit: *“Whatever men may think or feel on the subject, there can be no doubt, that the doctrine (i.e., of Hell) does stand in Scripture.”* Well, thanks a lot. It’s jolly nice of you to concede that point – however reluctantly.

He then adds: *“In describing the future punishments of the impenitent, let man not speak of them as one at ease; and let him not describe God as taking pleasure in the infliction.”* (But that’s exactly what God plainly says He does, and what Richard Baxter and Jonathan Edwards plainly preach from the Scriptures that He does.)

“I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh.”

(Prov. 1:26)

“He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision.”

(Psa. 2:4)

And then, lest someone arise to actually preach what God says is the truth, weasel Erskine hastens to substitute an Old Wives Tale for his lack of Bible authority for his nonsensical proposition; to wit: *“And it ought to be remembered,”* says Erskine, *“that men are not made Christians by terror, but by love.”* How quaint. And listen to this garbage: *“It is the genial ray of the Sun of Righteousness, and not the storm of the divine wrath, which compels the sinner to lay down the weapons of his rebellion.”* Baloney. Not made Christians by terror, you say? God plainly and specifically says otherwise, at **Jude 23**; to wit: ***“And others save by fear (i.e., by terrifying them)!”*** Not made Christians by terror, you say? Wrong! You turkey; to wit:

“And of some have compassion, making a difference. And others save with fear (terror), pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.” (Jude 22,23)

And just look at the Devil’s syrup dripping from old Erskine’s lying lips, when he says: *“Our gracious Master, who suffered in our stead, and whose deep, and solemn, and tender interests in our welfare, could not be doubted, did, indeed, in his discourses, always set before men life and death, as the solemn alternatives of their choice.”* This is a long-winded way of reluctantly admitting that Jesus Christ was the greatest Hell-fire and damnation preacher who ever lived. Then Erskine adds these disgusting misrepresentations about the preaching of Christ on earth; to wit: *“But in his mouth it is still the language of affectionate, though urgent persuasion.”*

This charlatan paints the ridiculous word-picture of a timid, impotent god who reluctantly casts billions of his creatures into eternal torment – AFFECTIONATELY! Think of it! To Erskine, the blooming idiot, **Mat. 25:41** is amended by his so-called “Introductory Essay” to read as follows: *“I love you, you filthy sinners, but I have cursed you with an everlasting curse. Therefore, with great affection for each of you, I must cast you into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.”* Lawyer Thomas Erskine, who would thus pervert the plain teachings of Jesus Christ, is likely to have been in Hell himself for nearly 200 years now; and it is certain that he now knows better about Hell. And he now knows clearly that the Lord Jesus was not joking when he said:

“And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell; yea, I say unto you, fear him.” (Mat. 10:28)

“There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.” (Heb. 4:9)

Amen.